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Jean Kathleen O'Neill.

B.A. (Hons.)

Woman in Athens of the 5th. century B.C.

Her role in society: her role in contemporary  
drama: a comparative study.

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## ABSTRACT

An evaluation of the role of women in fifth century Athens, through an examination of the contextual environment, presents the possibility that, although appearing to hold a subsidiary position in a male-dominated society, in actuality, the citizen-class woman had a covert power which was acceptable to, and accepted by, a society which respected and protected her.

This role of potential influence was carried over into the drama, where the choice of particular episodes by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, whose works form the sole extant corpus, emphasises the importance of the female position, and has assumed a universally applicable relevance through the realism and accuracy of the characterisations.

The development of institutionalised drama in this century was only incidentally as entertainment. Its primary functions were spiritual and didactic, thus providing an opportunity for the communication of truths, basic to existence, to an audience who, within such an environment of sensory totality, were receptive to, and capable of, influence by the dramatist's words.

Love and peace are essential for man's well-being and, indeed, for his survival. It is necessary constantly to remind him of this. Analysis of particular plays reveals that, whether intentionally or not, these two elements dominate and shape the form of the dramatist's message. Women the bearers of life, are the chosen media for this vital communication.

---

To  
M. Gregory Wareing O.C.S.O.  
in gratitude.  
Love and Peace.

---

"See then, dear friends, what a great and wonderful thing love is.  
Its perfection is beyond all words."(Clement of Rome. Apostolic  
Fathers. 50).

"How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers live in unity."  
(Psalm 132.i).

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INTRODUCTION.

Over two thousand years ago, within the context of a society reputedly dominated by men, the great 5th. century dramatists, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, presented female characters whose realism and psychological accuracy made, and have continued to make, them universally recognizable as powerful media of communication.

The purpose of this study has been to consider the relationship between the actuality of the dramatic role and that of its contemporary social counterpart. By analysing the role allotted to women by their society and comparing it with that created for them by the artist, it will be seen that, despite the apparent inferiority of the woman's position in the state, dramatically, she was given importance and influence.

The development of institutionalized drama in the 5th. century was only incidentally as entertainment. Its primary functions were spiritual and didactic, thus providing an opportunity for the communication of truths basic to existence. Using traditional material, within a formalised structure, the dramatist was yet able to reveal an individualised interpretative style to convey his message to his audience.

Love and peace are essential for man's well-being and, indeed, for his survival. It is necessary constantly to remind him of this, in the present as in the past. The analyses of those plays under review shows that whether intentionally or not, these two elements dominate and shape the form of the dramatist's message. It is fitting that women, though seemingly regarded as of little account, should as the bearers of life, have been chosen as the media for this vital communication.

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PART 1.The woman's role in 5th, century Athens.

"There is, in fact, no literature, no art of any country, in which women are more prominent, more important, more carefully studied and with more interest, than in the tragedy, sculpture and painting of fifth-century Athens." (Gomme, A.W. (1937), p.92).

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(i) The civic role.

There is no evidence to determine the exact number of women living in Athens during this period, or what proportion of those women were members of the citizen-class. As a generalisation, the female tends to outnumber the male. In times of war, this becomes even more evident. Therefore, as the Peloponnesian War (431) continued its lengthy course, the male population was correspondingly reduced and the need for women to bear male-children obviously increased. The unfortunate arrival of a girl placed the baby's future in some jeopardy, especially if she were in any way defective, for the father had the right to determine whether the infant should be exposed. Although this was an overt action of family rejection, it did not necessarily result in death.<sup>1</sup>

From her introduction to life, therefore, the female's role, and the continuation of her very existence, were determined by her social context. For the determined and intelligent woman, this context must have presented situations of conflict, frustration and the practice of self-control; the ability to manipulate situations and people, the skill of unselfish dissimulation, strength masquerading as weakness. Socrates realised the hidden potential "that the female sex are nothing inferior to ours, excepting only in strength of body, or perhaps steadiness of judgment - they are capable of learning anything you are willing they should know to make them more useful to you." (Xen. The Banquet. (9)). Through their husbands,

1. Patterson, Cynthia. (1985). pp. 103-123.

their sons, there lay the possibility of influencing the direction of both present and future.

---

(ii) Wife and Mother.

However limited a woman's skills may be, it is she who maintains the well-being of, and the emotional balance within, the home. It is she, whose constant association with her infant-children at their most innocently receptive, can, both consciously and unconsciously, begin the shaping of their personalities, through the daily assimilation of her ideals, her beliefs, her attitudes, her behaviour-patterns. There is a particular strength in the mother-son relationship, of an especial value to the community and for its future. The Athenian woman, forced by social expectation to concentrate upon managerial tasks within the home<sup>1</sup>, was in an even potentially stronger position, through the closeness and continuity of the relationship, to influence the direction of her son's thinking. That which is learned at an early age is recognized to be the basis of the developing persona.

At the same time, such a relationship at such an impressionable age contained within itself the potential for maladjusted growth. Social expectation as to how the male should regard the female must, inevitably, have conflicted with the child's natural love for his mother. Fear of the expression of the filial emotion produced fear of oneself, of one's reactions, and led to the possibility of an unnaturally aggressive and contemptuous attitude. Strong women were to be, particularly, feared. The depiction of Zeus-in-command yet bedevilled by contentious and domineering women<sup>2</sup> may have been a reflection of man's own fear for his safety. Men married young wives who were naturally pliable and easily dominated, controlled by paternalism. It was women's growing intellectual and emotional maturity which became their self-defence.

The potential wife appears to have been her mother's companion

1. Xen. Oec. VII. 19-42.

2. Aesch. Prom. Bound. 584-41.

from infancy, secluded and protected from overt social intercourse. Her mother, and possibly a female-slave, remained her careful companions until the door of the bridal-chamber was reached. Her marriage had been arranged for her by her parents and her husband-to-be; she was a mechanism for procreation, in a business contract.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, her husband had already seen her at the Great Panathenaea, where privileged virgins not only served the goddess<sup>2</sup> but became the object of interested attention from an audience which included not only the ever-watchful mother or chaperon, but doubtless the potential suitor. However, although physical beauty was an admired attribute and the public praise of young men was socially acceptable that of women was regarded as unseemly.<sup>3</sup> The man looked, evaluated and chose. The girl had no parity of educational opportunity with her brothers, and but limited knowledge of household skills and management, so that she was, necessarily a pupil under her husband's instruction.<sup>4</sup> The value of her dowry obviously outweighed that of her adolescent housewifely attributes. It is difficult to comprehend, however, how the man, leaving woman's companionship at an early age, should have acquired greater knowledge as home-manager than a girl, whose experience was bounded by women and their interests, and who must have been aware of the administrative adroitness of her mother. Similarly, the presentation of a socially graceful but illiterate spouse who, in order to fulfil her expected social role, acquires complex skills, ranging from accountancy to medicine, who is in charge of her slaves' instruction and the physical and economic well-being of her immediate community, all as her husband's pupil, is somewhat hard to credit. It is considered that what went on in the seclusion of the home was not fully appreciated and was, certainly, undervalued.

The female was protected by her man-devised society from her birth - that is, if society permitted her survival - to her death.

1. Xen. Oec. VII. 11.12.

2. Arist. Lys. 646-7.

3. Thuc. 2.45

4. Xen. Oec. X

A-property which is protected is usually highly-regarded by its possessors, not denigrated because of its inferiority: it possesses an unspoken influence and regard. The woman of citizen-class, although not herself a citizen, "not politically free" (Eliot, A. (1972), p.76), having, with metics and slaves, no voice in the life of the polis, no deme or phratry registration, this woman was surounded by a fence of law and custom.

Regarded as the weaker sex, women were both maintained and protected by the state. No woman was allowed to remain alone or lonely.<sup>1</sup> In the sixth century, Solon had decreed that any woman travelling by night must be in a carriage preceded by a torch-bearer.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis, of course, lies in the need for chastity, before and after marriage, to retain the purity of the oikos and its economic stability. Segregation of the sexes, which appears to have been applicable to all classes, within clearly defined social boundaries, was a natural result. While women were allowed to be present at meals with their husbands, their presence was not permitted on occasions where they would be in the company of other men.<sup>3</sup> It was a rarity for men and women to have social contacts outside the home. No man was allowed to enter the women's quarters.<sup>4</sup> Women were permitted to visit friends, theatre or temple, sometimes accompanied by a slave.<sup>5</sup> On no occasion would any woman allow herself to talk with a man in the street. The woman was sometimes allowed to go with her husband on a journey, for example to a shrine. Although ritual mourning of the dead was expected, a display of public grief was discouraged. Its emotional potential was considered to encourage disorderly behaviour and the possibility of the woman's physical involvement with strange men. It was only as she grew older that the woman achieved greater independence and freedom of expression and movement. The man's sexual relationships with others were accepted, the woman's never. She was the object of civic regard, responsible as progenitress, for the maintenance of the population level, for the

1. Lacey, W.K. (1968) p.174.

2. Plut. Solon. XX1.

3. (Killo, H.D.F. (1951) p.219.  
Gould, J.P. (1950) p.80.

4. Xen. Oec. IX 5.  
Killo H.D.F. (1951) p.21  
Gould, J.P. (1950) p.4  
Whibley, L. (1963) p.61

guardianship of the home, for the fiscal security of the state. "Your great glory is not to be inferior to what god has made you, and the greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticizing you." (Thuc. 2.45.2.)

Nonetheless, despite the fact that she was the precious property of the man, from whom she obtained her civic identity, the strength of her kinship orientation allowed her to offer advice upon family affairs. For example, she could be involved in will-making, not only in giving advice but in casting a deciding vote. It was possible, therefore, for her potential of influence to be both legal and political.<sup>1</sup> This activity does not seem to imply intellectual inadequacy or lack of social self-confidence; in fact, it is indicative of a parity of regard. It is interesting to note that Pericles' consideration for women led to the promulgation of a citizenship law (451-50) which decreed that the male's role in society was dependent upon that of his mother as well as that of his father. Her influence was intrinsic to the fabric of the state, covertly accepted, outwardly unacknowledged.

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(iii) Her Specific Duties.

Her primary social obligation was to be a biddable and apt pupil under the guidance and instruction of her husband, obedient to his wishes.<sup>2</sup> In his absence, especially if this were to be of lengthy duration, she was responsible for maintaining the economic equilibrium of the household and the wellbeing of its inmates.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, with the gods' blessing, she was required to bear children, as a form of insurance against the future<sup>4</sup> - of the state, of her husband and herself. The girl had no obvious choice in this matter. It was a duty. Nevertheless, unless the parent was particularly dictatorial, compliance on her own terms was a possibility. It was, also, her duty to remain within her home environment and to be responsible for its government, its productivity and the wellbeing of its inhabitants, from children to

1 (Lucy, W.K. (1968) pp. 152; 154-61.  
(Gould, J.P. (1980) p. 49.

2. Xen. Oec. vii

3. (Aesch. Ag. (Clytemnestra)  
Hom. Od. (Penelope).

4. Xen. Oec. vii

slaves;<sup>1</sup> the latter were an essential and valuable economic asset.

It was the duty of older women, over sixty years of age, to deal with the ritual of death.<sup>2</sup> Women related to those men fallen in battle were expected to lament publicly at the tomb.<sup>3</sup> Their tomb-carvings included wife and children with the dead warrior.

The length of the Peloponnesian War, the gradual decimation of the male population, and its disruptive and destructive nature, the consequent Athenian plague, the lack of food, meant that women no longer lived in sheltered comfort but of necessity performed tasks to which they were ill-accustomed. Athens had to survive. The women of Plataea had fought with their men;<sup>4</sup> after Mantinea, the women of Argos had helped in the building of protective walls.<sup>5</sup> They had died with their men, or had become the victors' slaves. The fact that the Athenian woman was not called upon to act so dramatically does not mean that she, too, would not have been prepared to defend her own.

Because the marriage was an arranged affair, the existence of love between man and wife was an exception rather than the now commonly accepted rule in Western societies. Nevertheless, where the union was fortunate enough to encourage the growth of respect and accord, a mutuality of sympathetic consideration and trust, it would have been possible for love, in its truest sense, to have become present in the relationship. The woman was not, therefore, necessarily denied the opportunity for emotional, as well as physical, fulfilment within the marital state. Any extra-marital associations were, of course, prohibited.

Her husband, however, if he were a member of the upper-class, having already experienced and discarded a, probably idealised, homosexual relationship as a part of his social maturation, was able to satisfy his needs with a concubine, whose children he was ultimately able to legitimise, or an hetaira. "Hetairae we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons; wives to bear our legitimate children and to be trusted guardians of our households."

1. Xen. *Oec.* vi. 22; 33-37.

2. Lacey, W.K. (1968) pp. 148, 148.

3. Thuc. 2.34.

4. Thuc. 2.4.

5. Thuc. 5.82.

— (Dem. Against Neaera. 122.) The salons of the hetairae, who were usually cultured foreigners, attracted the intellectual and political elite of the day. These women had a specific and important role to play in society, for they fulfilled the needs of the mind as well as those of the body. They encouraged the growth of new scientific and philosophical ideas; they were the associates of Socrates and Euripides.

The wife accepted her position without demur. She was expected to find her own form of satisfaction within the confines of a well-run home. It is doubtful whether she felt insult or hurt. The roles of concubine and hetaira cover pleasures which are transitory and mutable; that of the wife is of greatest importance for the safe continuity of those social entities which comprise the state.

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(iv) Her Socio-religious Activities.

Not only was the woman capable of exerting influence upon, and moulding, those within her immediate small environment but society had allocated her a far more potent role as religious advocate. As a medium of ritual and popular belief, in the constant repetition of the symbolisation of the life-cycle, les rites de passage, she held the ability to define the goals of society and its ultimate direction. The growing scepticism of traditionalism, engendered by the introduction of new ideas from the Ionian scholars, together with the brutalising effect of a protracted war, meant that the woman's task of religious reinforcement became even more important. As the governing class became more incredulous of the long-accepted, and more liable to question the tenets of belief, so the state became less stable and their own position within it less tenable. By a continual involvement in the organisation of the religious festivals throughout the year, the women were instrumental in maintaining the psychological power of their emotional mass-appeal; the festivals were both a controlling force and a satisfaction of public need. Belief breeds social security for the



individual, for the government, where doubt leads to insecurity and the possibility of public disorder. John Chadwick<sup>1</sup>, although referring to a previous period, the Mycenaean, is of the opinion that female independence was only really achievable within the religious sphere; one might add, and the power which such an independence encourages. It is very odd that this control of such a vital element of society was allowed to remain in the woman's hands, when its use, or misuse, by the ruling-class could have been employed as a manipulative weapon for political change and personal gain. Once more, one becomes aware of the latent fear in man's regard for woman, a fear of interference in that which was the female prerogative, a fear of public reprisal if the safety of the rituals of traditionalism were withdrawn, or altered in any way.

While the major part of the total number of the festivals was, in effect, the property of the women, there were some in which their role was participatory and not controlling. The Genesia was an occasion for public lamentation at the tombs of relatives, an important part of the social obligation to one's deceased. At the Oschophoria, associated with the cult of Theseus, the women were allowed to mix with young men, themselves in female disguise, and to accompany their husbands to the subsequent public feast. The husbands presumably kept a careful watch upon their women to avoid the possibility of licentious behaviour. The Lenaea, which became specifically oriented to the countryside, was a similar opportunity for sexual freedom. The emphasis of the presentation was upon the phallic and included night-time, possibly maenadic activities which were capable of generating an uncontrollable scene of hypnotic hysteria. It is difficult to determine whether the high-born woman took a controlling and participatory role in this festival - (Was Euripides' choice of Agave as leader of the Bacchae representative of custom or an exceptional and specifically determined dramatic device?) - or whether the men used the peasant-women, together with professionally trained dancers, to carry out the necessary rituals. Centred upon Athens, itself,

1. Chadwick, John. (1976).

the City Dionysia, which developed into an important social event of religion and entertainment, provided a further opportunity for the women's public, processional appearance with the men.

As Iphigenia and Helen contrived esoteric and, in their case, imaginary rituals to safeguard themselves against the inroads of their sexual antagonists, so the Athenian women, in reinforcing the creation of a mystique of secrecy and rituals, male-knowledge of which was wholly antipathetic to the deities and thus alien to tradition, developed an area of freedom from male domination in which they could take decisions and assume responsibility for the actions of others. The women became inter-dependent and could assume roles of power employable against their opposing male groups.

The festivals which came under their control were based mainly upon Demeter and Dionysos, symbols of fertility and creativity. The earth-mother figure was especially honoured at the Thesmophoria and the Skira, at which the women, of an accepted purity, officiated in secret rites concerned with fertility. At the commencement of the proceedings, election of a presiding figure, for the former festival, was made by the women. They had full control. A festival of primitive origin associated with Dionysos, the specific representative of a natural, creative freedom, was the Anthesteria, at which the archon's wife, the Basilina, officiated and for which she had control of fourteen ritually-trained women for the performance of secret rites. The format of Haloa, jointly associated with Demeter and Dionysos, was again known to be connected with a recognized and acceptable sexual licence, intended as propitiation for the maintenance of fertility. However, the emphasis was not wholly upon the need to ensure productivity, and the women's particular choice of deity reveals their realisation of and appreciation for the essentials of society -- not, Ares-war, Zeus-power or Aphrodite-lust, but Artemis-chastity, Athene-wisdom, Apollo-truth.

The Brauronia of Artemis, traditionally connected with Iphigenia of the Taurians, was held within the temple precincts and involved maidens and children; the latter, disguised as bears, were between five to ten years old; the younger the child, the greater her purity. They sang, danced and displayed their crafts. This service of the goddess, which required a lengthy residence of the acolytes within the temple, came to be regarded as a privileged civic duty, and was limited to those of the highest birth. Athene, as patron, overseer and protectress of Athens, was of particular public regard and importance. It was the women's responsibility, with secret rites, to clean and refurbish her statue: this was known as the Kallynteria. A visit to Delphi, situated beneath the shelter of Parnassos, above a valley of considerable beauty, and one of the centres for the oracular transmission of the god's message, appears to have been permitted to both sexes. It is, also, known that women travelled to the Parnassos' region with members of their own sex. Each year, Athenian women, known as Thyiades, stopping to dance at specific points along the route, met the women of Delphi for some unspecified ritual occasion. From Athens to Delphi is a long, wild way. Women of the peasant as well as of the citizen-class made the journey. Did they travel together, the former providing a measure of support for the latter? Or were the citizens specifically sheltered by the presence of male as well as female slaves? Perhaps, the aura of their religious fervour provided its own form of protection. There is no primary source evidence to satisfy the answers to these questions. What is certain is that their involvement in, and practice of, religious ritual presented the women with situations of potential control and covert power. The emphasis upon fertility, both human and natural, fulfilled society's need to ensure its continuity, in terms of population, stability and economic security. The women's own need to find freedom from social restraint and their hunger for psychological independence were satisfied by the importance of the role and the particular nature

of its ritual -- satisfaction for sexual appetite as well as for the intellect. The added separation from men which this role engendered reinforced the power of their difference.

The festivals produced two other events of particular social relevance to women. The first-named was limited to that time and place; the second, because of the manner of its content, was, and has become of an incalculable and universal importance.

Firstly, the festival of the Great Panathenaea, which took place at four-yearly intervals, was centred upon the presentation of a new dress, or peplos, to the statue of Athene, patroness of the city. Women, small girls and maidens were all required to fulfil principal roles in the important rituals associated with this gift. Nine months previously, little girls, known as the Arrephoroi, and the priestesses set the warp. Weaving of the woollen cloth was undertaken by the Ergastinai, aristocratic women especially chosen for this task. The finished garment was brightly coloured and ornately decorated, and was finally transported in procession from the Keramaikos gate to the Parthenon. The procession included not only those women and children who had been involved in its creation but high-born maidens, the Kanephoroi, carrying baskets of grain upon their heads as an additional placatory offering to the goddess. These maidens were selected by the civic authority and their inclusion was a visible social cachet; not to be chosen, or to be subjected to a subsequent refusal, brought shame to the girl and a reflected disgrace to her family. As well as their processional task, they acted as the chorus in the performance of original work composed by the archon's currently-favoured poet, and were carefully rehearsed by him. This public display of their charms and talents for these girls, whose life of seclusion prevented contact with men, was, despite the ever-watchful maternal chaperon, a potential opportunity for mutual evaluation and appreciation between the sexes.

Secondly, the Great Dionysia, a celebration of the creative

force, provided an environment of spiritual and artistic stimulation which saw the development of drama into a powerfully inspirational art-form which has had a lasting influence upon Western culture. In an atmosphere of competition, but not for personal glorification rather for the honour of serving the god, the artists presented their work for the instruction, the edification and the pleasure of the people. Their material was chosen from the store of myth and legend familiar to all. The form of communication had developed through the years into an institutionalized structure which, although apparently rigid, allowed for individuality of interpretation and great beauty of expression, so that an audience of many thousands was capable of involvement and participation, not always favourable, in the performance.

The plays were written and performed by men to an audience largely composed of men. Paradoxically, however, the roles which were created for the female characters, although these were interpreted by men, were of a psychological accuracy of a quite extraordinary observational exactitude, which has led to a universality of recognition and understanding throughout the succeeding ages. Examination will reveal that however apparently insignificant the role, the influence of the woman is felt upon fellow-performers and audience alike. She tends to become the focus of attention and the catalyst of dramatic action.

The fifth century woman was permitted to attend this festival as a spectator. Those of the citizen-class, who were accompanied by slaves, were carefully segregated from the courtesans. They were a silent minority. It is evident that the women as dramatically presented were the antithesis of the traditionally accepted image. Did they discuss the plays, and their roles therein, with each other? One would like to know. The men were permitted to enter the enclosure of the hetairae but not that of their families, although the hetairae were forbidden to visit the men. One assumes that in this particular enclosure there was a free cultural exchange between the sexes. How far did the women's opinions

of the dramatists' interpretation of their sex influence those of the men? Again, one would like to know. A.W. Pickard-Cambridge<sup>1</sup> contends that educated women preferred tragedy. This may have been because of the salacious nature of both comedy and satyr-play. Public enjoyment of such material may have been considered unseemly from a cultured woman though acceptable within the context of a rural audience. It is not clear whether the term "educated women" refers to socially-privileged women in general or whether it is specific to the known cultural attributes of the hetairae.

Women's influence within the religious sphere of fifth century Athens was primary and actual, in the sense that its revelance was particular to its time and place. Because of the emotional nature of its content, its psychological potential was far-reaching in its effect -- a covert force within an overt setting. Her secondary, indirect influence, as an integral part of the drama, is of far greater importance and of a lasting and universal value.

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(v) The Academic Controversy..

The concept of an equality between the sexes denotes the non-existence of a one-sex group domination, the unacceptability affecting society as a whole, of advantages given to one section of the community and not to another. Labelling and categorisation impose a certain identity upon the individual, and direct and regulate the social role. It is, therefore, a subject which is capable of generating over-emotional reactions which tend towards the irrational, and a biased subjectivity. Such an attitude is, self-evidently, one of which the historian should be especially aware. An absolute objectivity is not possible. Inevitably, however laudable the intellectual intention, deeply-embedded judgments will, unconsciously, direct the tenor of the writing; that which has been acquired in one's own past affects the shape of one's present and the form of one's future; a personal

1. Pickard - Cambridge, A.W. (1953), p. 265.

experiential totality which will influence interpretation of the distant past. Obviously, the less documented the period under review, the greater the tendency towards subjective supposition, which is presented as truth.

The limited primary source evidence which is available for fifth century Athens increases the danger of the adoption of opinions of certainty; for example, vase-paintings show the domestic nature of women's lives. Nevertheless, domesticity does not, necessarily, mean subservience, but is merely indicative of the practice of the traditionally allotted and accepted role, a prestigious role which is socially essential, and, as other evidence, both visual and literal reveals, led to honour and respect from society. Evaluating contemporaneously, Socrates<sup>1</sup> supported this feeling of public regard, whilst Plato<sup>2</sup>, from environmental observation, appreciated the value of woman's ability and her inherent potential, which could be employed professionally for the good of the community. His ideal state calls for equality of educational opportunity, a reproductive choice which would satisfy the needs of the twentieth century, and the possibility of governmental opportunity for the more mature woman.

Aristotle<sup>3</sup>, however, whether speaking from an acquired bias or as the mouthpiece of some of his trepidation-filled and role-propective male contemporaries, regards women as of an inferior nature, needing to be ruled firmly, and with no legal or franchise rights. As they have a different appreciation of the virtues to that of men, their understanding of morality is questionable. It is their bounden duty to maintain intact all that the man has provided. He omits to mention that a percentage of the family income and possessions stemmed from the wife's dowry. To place a woman in a position of power was to be avoided, at all costs. She would only cause disruption and discord. This is a subjective generalisation, stemming perhaps from an unfortunate personal experience,

1. Xen. The Banquet. (A).

2. Plato. Rep. v. 1-2.

3. Aristotle. Pol. i.

which does dis-service to himself, as scientific, logical observer, and to his disciples who, influenced by the aura of his reputation, would have tended to accept such statements unquestioningly.

Robert Flaceliere<sup>1</sup>, in accepting a similarly negative viewpoint, acknowledges the existence of the paradox of social inferiority, as exemplified by slaves and women, within a democratic state. On page 130 of his book "Greek Literature for the Modern Reader", H.C. Baldry denies the existence of formal educational possibilities to girls, other than the acquisition of housewifery, and states that this situation was common throughout Greece. He appears to forget that the Spartan girl received opportunities equal to that of her male peers. He omits mention of the cultured Ionians who, obviously, received their knowledge and intellectual stimulus from somewhere.

Xenophon's<sup>2</sup> description of the woman's role in the marital state can be evaluated with both disfavour and favour. Those advocating emancipation from male dominance would see Isomachus' biddable wife as a browbeaten nonentity. Those appreciating the reality of woman's role in society would realise the strength and value of the man's relationship with his wife and the mutual benefit which was to be gained from it. It was essential for the good of its inmates that the household should be managed with an ordered and caring efficiency. Under the gods' benevolent protection and the husband's instruction, the girl-wife learned all aspects of home-management, performing her required duties with pleasure, the pleasure gained from helping to create and maintain an environment of peace and plenty for those in her care. The man was her willingly accepted teacher and guide, whom she was prepared to obey and serve; hard physical work was, in itself, a form of beauty. Those who are prepared to work for the good of others do not exist in a negative shade.

On the positive side, A.W.Gomme<sup>3</sup> considers that such an inequitable situation would have been wholly unacceptable to the cultured Athenian

1. Flaceliere, Robert (1962), p. 107.

2. Xen. Oec. III, VII - 8.

3. Gomme, A. W. (1926), p. 107.



male, and that vases, tombs and urns show attitudes of respect and honour. W.K.Lacey<sup>1</sup> in stressing the historian's unwelcome subjectivity, sees the woman's life as one of comparative freedom and interest, not dissimilar to that of other women in subsequent periods. J.P.Gould<sup>2</sup> contends that because there is no certain evidence, the need for the interrogatory, rather than the dogmatic, view is even greater. He sees the woman as having had far more influence than is generally considered through a form of covert control which infiltrated society.

The establishment of truth from an examination of factual evidence of the immediate past is difficult. The choice of matter, the manner of interpretation, the bias, the manipulation to fit the personal theory are forms of unconscious dishonesty which one understands, but of which one must be aware in determining one's own evaluation. An increase in difficulty and a need for added awareness are in direct correlation to a more distant past, where there is a limitation in the supply of evidence.

An emotional subject, dealing with social role-play and involving the complex subtleties of inter-personal relationships, particularly those between the sexes, presents its own problem, a problem of acquired environmental behaviour-patterns which tends to interpret the past in terms of the present. Truth becomes mutable through time, coloured by differing mores within which its evaluation is determined. The actuality of a situation becomes an imponderable, and reality, a self-projection through the imagination. It is more honest to present an assumptional "this is how it appears to have been" than an authoritative "this is how it was."

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(vi) Conclusion.

It is not unusual for married women to spend the major part of their time within the confines of the home, occupied with its upkeep and the well-being of its inmates. This does not make them inferior.

1. Lacey, W.K. (1968), p.176.

2. Gould, J.P. (1980), p.42.

Involved as they are with essential daily duties, they inhabit a system of self-imposed segregation. The form of their activities limits their everyday relationships to those of the same sex. They acquire practical skills, from necessity, and lead, comparatively, active mental lives in the company of constantly-enquiring children for whose intellectual growth they are largely responsible. Household management demands a variety of skills, from economics to nursing. As their children grow and spend less time at home, involvement in voluntary work, or a desire for intellectual improvement are stimulations which continue their housebound self-education.

From a distance of some two thousand years, the Athenian woman would recognize herself in this picture. She, however, had the added advantage of mandatory protection from a state which recognized the importance of her role. Although the initial educational content may have been limited, she continued to learn and educate herself throughout her life. She learned through her mother, her kin, her peers, her husband and, indeed, her slaves. She learned through watching and listening. It was essential for her to be receptive of knowledge if she was to be of any value to the husband who had chosen her, or to his children. She was responsible for the organisation of their environment. Her companionship was influential in the direction of her young children. Not only was it her acknowledged duty to produce sons, but to prepare them for their future roles in society. She was, therefore, ultimately responsible for maintaining political and economic security through the production and nurture of this vital civic material. Her covert, but accepted, interest in legal matters, her overt and acknowledged involvement in religious practice, were influences which were capable of effecting change, within the individual, in the state.

Such influences, the unconscious power of which is, probably, not fully realised, are, nevertheless, intrinsic to the fabric of society and accepted by the majority. The greater sensitivity and awareness of

— the dramatic poets led to their realisation of woman's true worth, and to their choice of women as the media of communication of their individual messages, forceful messages of a universal relevance, timeless and physically boundless.

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PART IIThe Woman's role in 5th. century drama.Introduction.

"And just as in man's soul there are two forces, one which is dominant because it deliberates, and one which obeys because it is subject to such guidance, in the same way, in the physical sense, woman has been made for man. In her mind and her rational intelligence she has a nature the equal of man's." (Augustine, Conf. XLII.32.)

(a) Drama

A combination of environmental influences and a socio-psychological need requiring satisfaction, co-existent at a particular time, has established fifth century Athens as the generating factor which gave birth to structured drama. Thematically based upon cause and effect, the plot was also developed in logical sequence. Emotionally charged, this art-form could not fail to inspire, to influence, to change both actors and audience. Because the themes deal with fundamental emotions and situations which, if not immediately familiar, are commonly accepted and recognized as a part of the cultural heritage, because of its nature, the subject-matter and the totality of its experiential impact are as relevant today as they were some 2,400 years ago. A play which expresses man's basic feelings, which provides satisfaction in the resolution of his primary problems of identity, of security, of moral certainty, which fulfils the need for imaginative involvement and the sharing of experience with his fellows, such a play has a universality which is timeless. The application of the word "education" to the dramatic art-form is a justly given attribute, for the observer is "drawn-out", of himself, of his surroundings, by

that which is observed. He who entered the theatre is not the same as he who leaves it. While there may be an apparently receptive similarity within the audience, in actuality both reception and its effect are wholly specific to the individual.

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b) Love and Peace

As active elements throughout the world, inter-related, precious and essential to the creation and maintenance of an optimum life-style, love and peace are difficult to obtain. Alive in small pockets of concern and care, on the fringe of consciousness, it is man, himself, who prevents their flowering. His turbulent past, his present conflict, his uncertain future witness to the wilfulness of his self-determination, his inability to utilise the most perfect of all gifts for the good of all peoples, everywhere.

The Athenian religious belief was based on an anthropomorphic system of gods and goddesses from which love, in its highest sense was singularly absent. It is sad that contemporary post-Christian societies are, today, witnessing the growth of that very pitiless aggression which was typified by the conduct of these Greek deities in their dealings with men.

Love leads to peace; there is peace in true love. Love which is synonymous with caring and sharing, a mutually agreed exchange, an interdependence which yet allows for individuality. It is understanding, compassionate, selfless. It creates relationships of responsibility, where service to others is the norm rather than the exception. Love brings social unity. Unity provides security, and the opportunity for personality growth. From small beginnings,

the power of love spreads ever further abroad, from the one to the many, returning for the ultimate benefit of the one ... for love brings peace.

Where there is no love, where its value and necessity are disregarded, its social role undervalued, the negative elements inherent in man prevail. Self becomes the focus of existence, the rationale for work and survival. The man who is driven by his ego works for personal aggrandisement. His lusts come to the fore. Greed and a need for power can lead naturally towards hatred and aggression. Conflict now becomes almost inevitable. This, in its turn, easily produces pain, suffering, destruction and even degradation. When it is nations and not man, alone, who are involved in these egocentred struggles, the results can be cataclysmic. It should be clear that force may only be used morally as a last resort to obtain justice. All other pertinent means of conciliation or arbitration should have been tried in order to obtain a peaceful, as well as a just, solution to any dispute.

However, man's past and indeed his doubtful present, unstable in its insecurity, reveal that the cycle of 'love begetting peace, and peace, in its turn begetting love' is almost a chimera. His daily existence is clouded by the thought of imminent war. His behaviour would appear still to be rooted in a far-distant past, within which aggressive tactics were the main weapons for personal survival, and that of the tribe. He does not yet appear to have reached a stage which would enable him to withstand the temptations of power and economic greed, which he translates as 'defence' and 'national growth'. Pathetically, he sees the need for peace but lives within an environment of his own contriving,

preparing for destruction.

A naturally gregarious animal, man possesses some of the elements needed to establish caring and profitably peaceful social surroundings, in which development of the individual can be effected to its optimum potential. Yet, this man, endowed with such gifts, tends to choose violence in word and deed, in preference to working towards peaceful solutions of problems as they arise. For some extraordinary reason, the peaceful man is often seen as a coward, a weakling, even, a traitor. The violent man is renowned for his courage, his strength, his patriotism; his aggression is symptomatic of his virility. In actuality, the man who works for peace may have far more courage, both moral and physical, than the aggressive, governed by his unbridled passions, and not by a controlled and controlling reason. If wrongful aggression is planned and carried out coldly, then the action is even more evil, because deliberately chosen.

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c) Athens

The fifth century city-state is a microcosmic example of a theoretic ideal which, in practice, was destroyed by circumstances engendered by pride and self-glorification.

The establishment of a democratic form of rule meant that each male citizen had an active, informed and caring role to play. Dike - justice -- and eunomia - good government - were the bases of civic life. Although the Athenian interpretation of the theory denied voting rights to metics, to slaves and to women, nevertheless, these groups were not excluded from the concern of the state. The fact that the concern was political and expedient --- for these members of the community were essential for its satisfactory

continuation and well-being - - does not imply that the caring was superficial. The practical exercise of solicitude, irrespective of the motive, benefits both giver and receiver, and in the long-term, produces an atmosphere of emotional warmth, compassion and mutual understanding within the state, as a whole. Within such an environment, man becomes free to develop his intrinsic skills. The civic and cultural apogee which resulted from this upsurge of creativity occurred during the leadership of the charismatic Pericles. Unfortunately, there, also, occurred at this time, a series of events, arising through man's own shortcomings, which were to lead to the destruction of the ideal and the rejection of peace as a way of life. Overmuch pride led to imperial ambition and territorial expansion. The consequent fear felt by Sparta, the long-established foe, expressed itself in the physical power-struggle of a protracted war. Starvation, plague, a ruined economy, a decimated population and the humiliation of final defeat all served to provide a natural psychological aversion to the democratic ideal and led to excesses, discord and social disruption which demanded an antithetical political substitute. The ideal is destroyed through pride and greed.

Imperfectly practised in its own, its original, day, and with warning evidence available as to the causes of its failure, man still reveals his inability to fulfil the dream of a near-faultless form of government. The establishment of the democratic ideal demands a stable and, therefore, a peaceful environment for its satisfactory development. It needs a re-evaluation, a re-education of attitudes and behaviour-patterns within and between individuals, within and between groups. It requires a realisation of the importance



of care and concern where the good and need of others are of greater importance than any benefit to oneself. It should be the active expression of a charity, which is love. Human weakness, centred upon the self, prevents the true practice of the theory. Superficially, it appears to work, but, as in Athens, the modern counterpart falls a long way from the ideal. Love brings peace which allows for growth. Man is thus enabled to fulfil his rightful role in society.

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(d) The artist

The chosen one of the gods, the artist translates his environment into a form of sensory communication. Through the senses, he can stimulate the emotions which, in their turn, lead to the arousal of the intellect. His interpretation of personal experience and observation is unique and original. He is motivated by an inner compulsion which demands self-expression. He is disciplined by a single-mindedness of purpose, to create, to fulfil the need to exercise his imaginative powers, his innate artistry. He may spend a self-imposed and long apprenticeship in order to perfect his technique. He never ceases to practise, to explore new methods, to acquire fresh technical skills. As communicator, educator and, even, prophet, he is the agent of influence upon, the medium of change within, the individual, and from the individual, society.

The dramatist creates the form and content of the play, which of necessity, only truly lives when it is performed. The performance demands an audience, a responsive medium, an intellectual-emotional linkage between stage and auditorium. The actors and audience are capable of generating a powerful two-way communicating force; each is dependent upon the

other; when one withdraws, the magic bond is broken. The dramatist, through his actors, and aided by the tools of production - - music, dance, light, colour, sound - - is capable of drawing the audience within his own circle of interpretative vision. Confined by space, limited by time, it is evident that, if he so wishes, the playwright can manipulate, use, direct a mass-audience. He can reinforce, question or deny the current tenets of his society. Substantiation of the accepted leads to popularity and acclaim - such were Aeschylus and Sophocles, overtly conformist, patriotic and convinced of Athens' right in all things. Doubt and interrogation of the accepted leads to unpopularity and rejection - such was Euripides, apparently, non-conformist, questioning Athens' rights, overtly condemning a long and wasteful war.

Whether the reaction is positive or negative, the dramatist holds the power to involve the audience in his own line of thought, has made them examine and ponder upon their environment. Whether there is agreement or disagreement with the opinions expressed, the individual is made to reflect upon, evaluate and, even, re-assess his own values, his own position.

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(e) Women

Traditionally, womankind was supposed to have but limited emotional self-restraint. The Athenian male considered his woman to be unstable and, therefore, unreliable unless controlled by himself. Within a social context which acknowledged moderation as a guiding principle, the woman was, not denigrated as it has been assumed, but protected as a cherished possession, though, it must be

confessed, this was not to guard her from an unfortunate display of any irrationality, but to ensure the purity and well-being of the family. It is interesting to note that the role of the maenads, the followers of Dionysos, who were the personification of sexual licence and unusual behaviour, had been allocated to women, and not men, by society.

It was natural that the dramatists should be influenced by this commonly-held view of women, highlighted by the public ideal of temperance in all things, and that they should choose women as figures of warning to illustrate the destructive results of excessively emotional and psychologically unbalanced behaviour. Love is not absent from such examples but it is a sexual love which has gone awry. It has been rejected, it has been betrayed, it has vanished with time: Medea, Electra, Phaedra, Clytemnestra are painfully true examples of the devastating effects, upon the individual, upon her associates, of emotions which the will is unable to control, which distort the personality and which, ultimately, destroy. Artistic honesty, however, together with the actuality of observation, allowed, also, for the presentation of love in its truest sense, the ideal of self-abnegation, compassionate service, courageous loyalty: Iphigenia, Macaria, Alcestis, Antigone reveal the possible strength of the woman's supportive role in her community, her potential for the inspiration of idealism, her ability to control and direct her own needs for the good of her fellows rather than of herself.

The tragic hero's destruction invariably came about through a combination of two factors: he possessed an inherent flaw in his character, of which he was unaware, or, if he were aware, he refused to acknowledge its existence,

and he indulged, consciously and deliberately, in self-pride, a hubristic tendency which gave him the illusion of parity with the gods, and led to an unavoidable and conclusive punishment. His tragedy, because inner-oriented, is subjective and negative. The woman's destruction was due to a deliberately chosen course of action, a choice which, although emotionally-based, was intellectually substantiated, to her own satisfaction, at least. Her tragedy is objective, because outer-oriented, and positive. The man, as a tool of the gods, has no choice. The woman, even within the gods-oriented context, uses her free-will and chooses. The vital role of woman in the plays of Euripides shows the realisation, through time, of her importance, her potential influence, her power as a dramatic mouthpiece of political propaganda, morality or spirituality.

However, not only Euripides, but Aeschylus and Sophocles, as well, appear to have understood that woman, as a medium of communication, possessed an insidious intellectual and emotional force which made her a useful educational tool for the transmission of his personal message to his community. Whether, or not, this realisation is related to the deeply-embedded concept of female weakness and dependence, that women are physically and emotionally softer than men, the fact remains that, dramatically, an audience will have more sympathy for the female character than for the male. The degree of sympathetic appreciation is directly correlated to the level of femininity displayed: the more domineeringly aggressive the woman, the more masculine her attitude and behaviour, the more antipathetic the audience reactions tend to become. This myth of weakness was utilised with psychological adroitness by the dramatist.

Within the bounds of the play, its known unreality was appreciated and encouraged, so that the strength of the woman's role was increased proportionately, and was capable of admiration from both sexes. That which one admires, one listens to, reflects upon and, may even, in time, act upon.

Although the man is the ostensible hero of the action, the positive generator of events, it is the woman's accepted negative and passive social role which the dramatist's artistic sensitivity, his intuitive appreciation of reality, has transformed to one of influential power. Woman is the mouthpiece, the outward expression of his inner vision, the communicator of and commentator upon events of common concern to his audience. As the long and useless war dragged on, beginning to destroy the fabric of society, so the woman's role assumed an even greater potential as a medium of propaganda. Her use as an explicit anti-war tool demanded courage from her creator, but, ensured her immortality through the universality of her message. Woman is the traditional victim of man's aggression and his lust for power, a traditional victim of a fear-engendered war. War brings suffering and degradation, the brutalisation of the personality, to its victims, who represent the human detritus of its immorality and stupidity. The presentation of the reality of such a conflict as it affects woman, the archetypal non-combatant, emphasises the need for peace as a social essential. The dramatic use of war's negative aspects does potent service to the cause of the ideal of peace, within which the individual may develop for the ultimate good of his society.

Surrounded by an environment subject to an ever-increasing disintegration, Sophocles and Euripides, both

of whom the war out-lasting, presented the unrealised dream of peace through the actuality, the reality of civic and individual disruption, leading to the collapse of law and the crippling debasement of the personality. Within such a context, the artist's true task lies in the affirmation of his faith and hope that mankind's innate goodness, and his will to survive, will overcome the evil forces which attempt to overwhelm him. Through the darkness of disillusionment and despair comes a hope born of love: deeds of love which can encourage his continuation and lead to his social regeneration. The woman is the conveyer of this message of love - - of mother for child; of child for her parent; of sister for brother; of slave for her master; of sacrificial victim for the good of her fellows. Rejected love, however, misplaced love, love in which sexuality predominates, such a love contains the seeds of discord and destruction, and is a perversion of the ideal.

Beautifully, movingly, these powerful creations of woman stand out as exemplars of that selfless and courageous loyalty, of that denial of oneself for the good of the whole, which presents the possibility of the realisation of the ideal; a realisation which is still painfully relevant, still unachievable, in the twentieth century as it was in fifth century Athens. The plays and their significance are spatially and temporally universal.

Man's need for a self-identity, through an aggressive power, destroys. Woman's intrinsic need for peace and love form the bases of creation and progress.

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(f) Translation

Although capable of artistry, translation is an aid to communication and not an art-form in itself. It is representative of the joining of two creative personalities.

Translation from one language to another, therefore, presents the familiar pitfall of subjectivity. However sincere the intention, however profound the knowledge of the artist and his work, the translator will tend to include himself, also, in his interpretation. The further back in time that the work has originated, the more the possibility of textual corruption and the more difficult becomes the task of imaginative transference from one age to another, from one mind to another. Where the poetic form has been used conflicts of artistic personality make the task even more complex.

None of the plays of the three great dramatists was translated into English until the eighteenth century. A certain Robert Potter presented Aeschylus to a non-classical public in 1777, thus initiating similar efforts for both Sophocles and Euripides, and motivating a continuing output from the academic specialist, until the present day. There are more than fifty translations of "Agamemnon": which is the nearest to Aeschylus' original intention?

In order to ensure that this treasury of drama should remain a living and comprehended entity, it is necessary to effect translation within the context of a particular period. An eighteenth century interpretation would present the possibility of language-style barriers which would prevent adequate communication to a modern audience. A twentieth century translation becomes essential, a translation which would endeavour to convey, as far as is possible, without

distortion or untruth, the intentions of the original creation. Peter Green<sup>16</sup> contends that new translations should be undertaken, at least, every fifty years, to maintain the plays' universality and their relevance to the present.

In comparing one translation with another, of the same work, which one is true? Which one is closer to the creator's original vision? The choice is as subjective as are the choices available. Having made comparison with other translators, throughout this study, the writer's personal preference has devolved upon the collection edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore - (vide pp. vii and viii of Appendix B.)  
2, 6, 7 and 18 - 20) as representative of a modern medium of communication.

"The dialogue of ancient Greek drama is a unique form of expression. It employs pitch, not stress; it follows strict rules of 'long' and 'short' syllables, and it mingles archaisms and plain-speaking in a blend of ceremonial diction unlike anything in western dramatic literature". (Cavander, Kenneth, (1981). p. xix).

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1. Green, Peter. (1960).



## Chapter 1 - Aeschylus

- (a) The Persians -- Atossa, the Queen,  
mother, priestess and victim of war

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This play, the second part of a trilogy, was presented eight years after the decisive Athenian victory over the Persians, at Salamis. It is unique in that its subject-matter was based upon contemporary events, and it may, therefore, have been a commissioned work, intended as both celebratory and commemorative, a form of communal gratitude to the gods for the salvation of the state. Gilbert Murray<sup>1</sup> regards it as the first surviving historical play in European literature.

The public's acceptance of Aeschylus' dramatisation of a war-episode, and the rejection of Phrynichus' similar attempt, is perhaps explainable by the manner in which the former was interpreted. Aeschylus' grandeur of style and the emphasis upon the spiritual nature of his message -- simultaneously, as warning against hubris and the immorality of power, an increasing tendency in post-war Athens, and as thanksgiving for the gods' protection -- must, nevertheless, have become expressive of civic pride in victory and of relief at deliverance from slavery. In order to avoid the considerable danger of too much self-gratification however, the conquered were portrayed with charity and pity; an unusual interpretation. The effects of war become general and not particular, magnanimity breeds compassion and a realisation of one's own good fortune. The poet fulfilled his didactic function with a courageous originality.

Miletus, on the Ionian coast, whilst retaining its associations with Athens was sufficiently distant for

1. Murray, Gilbert. Aeschylus.(1940).

there to be no imminent danger of attack. Salamis, on the other hand, was too close to the city and possible invasion. Phrynichus' choice of the fall of Miletus although, no doubt, topical had, thus, less psychological impact upon a city secure within its walls, than it would if those walls were about to be breached.

"The Persians" is a static play, centred upon one event, the battle at Salamis, which is evoked with vivid word-pictures; the action lies in the imagery. Underlying are the familiar themes of the gods and the state; the punishment of man by the gods; the advantageous nature of democracy in comparison with an autocracy. The fact that this autocracy was foreign, strange and exotic added to its dramatic interest and illustrated, to audience-satisfaction, the commonly-held opinion that anyone who was not a Greek was a barbarian. The play contains a chorus of old men, supportive of the principals and supplying the audience with background information, and two actors. Philip Vellacott<sup>1</sup> considers that the action is centred upon the Herald, and Gerald Else<sup>2</sup>, upon Xerxes. The latter, as an example of the gods' punishment for an over-weening self-pride and ambition, is, surely, the obvious choice, although his appearance is limited to an emotional scene at the play's end. If the protagonist took this, the fallen-hero, role, then he played the Queen, as well, the deuteragonist taking the equally important parts of Darius and the Herald.

A male chorus and four acting characters, one of which is a woman. Why? One woman, surrounded by men, in an atmosphere of prescient disaster, disbelief, fear and sorrow, stands alone and represents those who are the victims of a prideful and unnecessary aggression. Her physical isolation

1. Vellacott, Philip - Aeschylus (1961)

2. Else, Gerald (1965)

creates a caring concern for an old and frightened woman, and gives strength to the poet's intentions of warning. Her emotional dependence upon the old men, finding mutual support in the weakness of age, arouses pity for her plight, but, at the same time, inspires admiration for her indomitable courage. She would be in the vanguard even if the enemy were at the gates of Susa. She is the personification of the war-mother, the queen, portraying her people's loving sorrow for its lost sons. She is seer and priestess, preparing her listeners for disaster, the intermediary between the actuality of this world and the insubstantiality of the next.

The representative of such qualities demands a complex characterisation, the creation of a living personality capable of fulfilling this role. If the character is developed without an adequate attention to reality, then the portrait tends towards the abstract and not the lifelike. One could say that Aeschylus' skill in this direction was still in the developmental stage. On the other hand, it is possible that the impression of the character as an abstraction was a deliberate dramatic ploy to highlight the humanity established by the Queen in her relationships with others. Perhaps, the dramatist intended that the observation of the charitable approach would produce a reciprocative realisation from the observer - - that the conquered are owed love and pity, rather than hatred and insensitivity. From the beginning of the play, an atmosphere is created between actors and audience which demands concern rather than mockery.

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The warriors have gone to war and the old men, Darius' contemporaries, are left as guardians of the state. "Doom is the omen" (L.10)<sup>1</sup>. They waste no time before intimating disaster, despite the power of Xerxes and the might of his army -- "Of her men the flower is gone" (L.59), while, as is war's custom -- " -- parents and wives/counting the days/Tremble at lengthening time" (Ls.62-4). There is no news. To say that Xerxes -- " -- is the equal of god" (L.80) makes the audience shudder in expectation of the certainty of punishment. The old men are possessed by foreboding. They know that man cannot escape his fate. A feeling of fear, uncertainty and distress has been clearly established, and the surmise that the intuition will become reality. The women wait and weep, for the possibility of an absence which may become permanent. The Queen, "-- a light whose splendor equals eyes of gods" (L.152), the royal-regent, representative of her people, reinforces the women's distress. She, too, is filled with doubt as to the satisfactory outcome of such an expedition, and with a mother's loving concern for her son, -- "-- mine eye, Xerxes" (L.169). She is sustained by the old men's loyalty, their long-standing relationship. They become interdependent at a time of impending tragedy. The old woman and her old men, status forgotten, united in their distress. The Queen, motivated by love for her son and fearful for his safety, confides to them her prophetic dream of his defeat. They attempt spiritual consolation and suggest that, as priestess-mediatrix between gods and state, she should intercede -- "For thee, thy son, thy city, and thy friends" (L.218), not only directly to the gods, but through the agency of her dead husband. Expressed with beauty and

1. Aeschylus ll. pp. 49-86. (Greene and Lattimore, 1956).

sensitivity, there is warmth in this exchange. The poet has created an atmosphere of comfort, of mutual respect and care.

Suddenly, the Queen disturbs the shared emotion -- "Where is Athens said to be?" (L.231). Where have they all gone to? What are we fighting for? Where is my son? The futility and waste of war are contained within that short question. The speed of the stichomythia passage which follows is, emotionally, indicative of the fact that once such a machine has been started, it will only stop when the combatants, themselves, cease. The arrival of the Herald, at the peak of anguished expectancy, with his dreadful news, justifies the Queen's -- "We mothers dread to calculate" (L.246) the implications of defeat. Shocked into silence, immobile and, once more, alone, she interrupts the choral lamentation. She has found the courage to ask that one important question -- "Who did not die?" (L.294). The age-old question asked by all suffering mothers as they scan the casualty-list. The relief -- "O for my palace a greater light/And after blackest night a whiter day" (Ls.300-01) -- involves her, actively, once more in the Herald's story. By her frequent interpolations, she encourages the continued narration of the news, for herself, for the audience. She is the impetus for the re-creation of events, the eye-witness's vivid account. As the tale unfolds, it becomes evident that the gods have not stinted their punishment -- "-- what greater hatred could fortune show?" (L.438). The shame of defeat through the cunning duplicity of the Greeks, the gods' favoured agents of disaster -- "O hateful deity! how the Persians/You deceived! Bitter was the vengeance/which my son at famous Athens found" (Ls.473-4). The survivors are few, but Xerxes is among

them. With a stoical acceptance of the gods' will, the Queen hopes for a better future "-- a brighter/Fortune, in time to come, may there be" (Ls.525-6). She is, now, the priestess who will beg forgiveness from the gods and consolation from Darius' spirit, in the offering of the placatory ritual, for her people's pride-induced wrongdoing.

The choral threnody of the defeated for their kin, (Ls. 531-97) encourages the audience to feel pity for the mourning foe, and fear, for themselves, that punishment is the inevitable result of hubris. It creates the right emotional atmosphere and maintains the dramatic tension for the Queen's re-entry in her role as priestess, the voice, the medium for the poet's moral lesson and his spiritual intent -- that the practice of evil leads to the isolation of the uncertain, whereas, there is always certainty in the company of the gods. In assuming the priestess' mantle, she is separated from her fellows, no longer on their level of communication, absorbed in the ritual of propitiation yet emotionally distraught by the total situation. Darius' ascent from the nether-world -- "Called a god in wisdom,/God in wisdom he was,/Ruled his people well" (Ls 654-6) -- will bring the comfort of solace and hope. The tale is told once more. Once more, the moral lesson is reinforced -- "The lowest depths of woe to suffer, payment/For his pride and godless arrogance" (Ls 806-7). The heinous offence of sacrilege, which had not previously been mentioned, was an additional stain upon the people, demanding retribution from the gods. Athens, the present victor, is warned, for "Zeus is the chastener of overboastful/Minds, a grievous corrector" (Ls 828-9). The Queen is instructed to advise Xerxes in the practice of wisdom, so that his fortune may be guided by

reason and not by emotion. Finally, she is to replace the priestess by the mother, and greet her returning child with the balm of her love. Her courage and the strength of their relationship will protect him from himself. "When evils come on those we dearly love,/Never shall we betray them" (Ls.851-2). This expression of maternal love is her concluding function, for she does not appear again. Xerxes' self-pitying lamentation which concludes the play is, certainly, dramatic, but it diminishes the human role, whereas the Queen's humanity and courage enhance it. Her approach to life, to her fellows is permeated with love.

Theatrically isolated by her sex and her age, her only contacts, old men and a spirit-husband, her physical prominence in the orchestra becomes a metaphor for her role. She is the poet's choice as the dramatic vocalisation of the moral lesson which he considered it to be necessary for his audience to learn -- that an overweening national pride is self-destructive, in human and spiritual terms. To fulfil his purpose, the poet created a woman who could be interpreted as Persia-personified, an abstraction of essential social functions -- queen, seer, priestess, moral commentator, mother -- within a context of doubt and fear. The skill, however, with which this woman's inter-relationships are shown and developed brings warmth and recognizable life to the abstraction. The impact of the moral lesson is increased by the character's strength in isolation, whether it is termed abstraction or dramatic device.

In an atmosphere of death and mourning, loss and destruction, the Queen waits, with a loving and heartsick concern, for the return of her son, defeated and humiliated by

the gods. She is the woman, she is woman, who is still able to love the one who has destroyed peace.

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(b) The Oresteia -- Women as victims of external forces; the denial of love; the destruction of peace; the redemption.

"-- a trilogy whose especial greatness lies in the fact that it transcends the limitations of dramatic enactment on a scale never achieved before or since" (Lattimore, Richmond, ~~and~~ Aeschylus.1.(1953) p. 31.

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The theme of "The Oresteia" originated with Homer who made Aegisthus responsible for the murder of Agamemnon, with Clytemnestra as an accessory to, but not an active participant in, the deed. Orestes was the medium of retributive justice, which did not involve matricide. Agias of Troezen, Arctinus of Miletus and the Cypria, all in the eighth century, extended Clytemnestra's role to that of associate murderess, with the resulting blood-guilt, demanding punishment from Apollo. Primary source evidence from vase-paintings reveals that from the late seventh century onwards, Clytemnestra became the instigator of murder and the sole killer of her husband. Such an essentially moral and emotional theme was admirably suited to a dramatic interpretation, and, at the same time, fulfilled the artist's didactic function. The introduction of the Electra-character, connected with both sides of the agon, the accused and the accuser, added still more to the trilogy's interest and popularity.

Superficially, this is a story of violence and lust, a continuation of a series of unpleasant events affecting one particular family. Agamemnon, lord of Argos, returns, after



ten years, victorious from Troy, only to be traitorously murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra and her lover, and his cousin, Aegisthus. Under the old law, such a deed demands retributive justice from a kinsman. The exiled Orestes, at Apollo's command, comes home to avenge his father, and destroys both mother and stepfather. He is then, tormented by the Erinyes, the personification of his guilt, for the heinous offence of matricide. With the assistance of his mentor, Apollo, he goes to Athene, who, in introducing the concept of trial-by-jury, institutionalises justice. Orestes is pardoned. The wisdom of Athene-Athens has replaced physical violence with reasoned discussion. A satisfactory resolution has been gained by means of the rational rather than the emotional. The matter, therefore, has melodramatic tendencies, but the manner of Aeschylus' interpretation has produced a work of beauty and power, pain and suffering, fear and loneliness, rejection and the unnatural; a psychological study of complex inter-relationships; a microcosmic picture of the ills to which humanity is susceptible, if the will towards evil is stronger than that towards good.

A work of art which retains its power through the centuries does so because its examination of the human condition is universally relevant. At the same time, the artist's portrayal will have attempted to represent and interpret the mores, the atmosphere of the society within which he is working. Academic opinion tends to the view that the trilogy is a metaphor for the socio-political development of Athens, from the barbaric to the civilised, where the blood-lust of the Atreidae for retributive justice is replaced by the rule of law, controllable by the polis.

Nevertheless, the dramatist, even while acknowledging the satisfactory nature of current civic affairs, is fully aware of man's inherent aggression and his potential for destruction ... "... it gives voice and form to the social and political ideology of the period."

(Zeitlin, Froma I. Areth. 11. (1978), p. 149).

This theory, as a possibility, satisfies the artist's possible intention to present the contemporary and specific, and illustrates his role as educator. Even more interesting and forcible, however, is the dominance which he gives to his women characters, whose influence is evident throughout the work -- destroyers, motivators of action, and, finally generator of peace -- guiding the direction of the plot as an emotional force which becomes controlled and rationalised. The original audience, largely composed of males, no doubt interpreted this picture of female-dominance as a warning of that which happens when men lose the advantages of the traditional role, and become governed by insidious manipulation. It is not possible to say whether this was Aeschylus' didactic intention. It is far more interesting and far more favourable to his reputation as a creative artist of imagination, sensitivity and spirituality, if one considers that the prominence of the women was a deliberate choice and is directly related to the work's universal appeal. Women are shown as the victims of external circumstances, and as the victims of their own personalities, which, in turn, have been situationally moulded. They are examples of a love which is soured, leading to the rejection of morality and the acknowledgement of hate. Their deeds, while horrific, are pitiable because inevitable, as inevitable as will be their punishment. External events, fate, the gods are too strong for them and their choice lies

with evil.

The history of the house of Atreus, and, particularly, the history of Agamemnon and his family, is a tale of love denied and perverted, producing a continuum of violence and revenge for violence. Overshadowing these centralised happenings, is the malevolent influence of war which has disrupted, destroyed and embittered. The denial of love and the absence of peace allow for the activation of the basest instincts. The presence of hate, the miasma of conflict permeate the plot and control the direction of the character-development. Femininity is metamorphosed into an unnatural violence; the woman assumes male, aggressive tendencies. The unspeakable dishonour occurs when man is destroyed by woman: the unspeakable horror occurs when woman is destroyed by her child. There is no denying that the characters are responsible for their actions, in spite of protestation that these are god-controlled, but their responsibility has grown askew, distorted by circumstances for which they are not wholly accountable. These women represent those whose reason, whose rationale for action, is governed by their emotions. Potentially dangerous under normal conditions, especially so where the environment is disadvantageous to the pursuit of rationality. They are not particular to fifth century Athens, they are universals. Those who are drawn to adopt violence as their ethos, destroy. However, it is possible, of course, for women who are in control of the emotional side of their personality, to be peace-makers. They, too, are universals. They have chosen wisdom as the dominant force, wisdom which is compassionate, forgiving and understanding, which generates concord and which gives hope that men may be enabled to

co-exist in peace.

Aeschylus' illustration of the past, his warning for the future is very clear, universally applicable. Irrationality, absorption in self-interest, lack of control are destructive. Women were acknowledged as a source of emotionalism and potential danger; therefore, Clytemnestra is the catalyst of violence within the action, and her influence, even in death, is felt until the beginning of the final part. However, the dramatist appears to have realised that the depiction of continuous and unalleviated acts of revengeful hatred would leave his audience in a state of psychological disequilibrium, generating a potentially dangerous mass-excitement. It was necessary for the establishment of calm, after such a highly-charged participatory experience, and, through the agency of Athene's wisdom, peace is enthroned.

There can be but little doubt that Aeschylus' intention in this finale was didactic. Not only as an expression of his belief in the power of the gods to direct man's actions, but as a political gesture in praise of the wise rationality of Athenian democracy. Nevertheless, one must bear in mind the sensory totality of audience involvement and the effect which this moving and spectacular exodos must have had. Civic pride certainly, but, also, the satisfaction of a universal need for a peaceful solution to life's problems. The emotional and intellectual effect upon the individual, upon the mass, is as potent today as it was so many years' ago. Athene is the motivator of pacification by the persuasion of her wisdom and moderation, not Zeus, the lord, nor Apollo, the cultured, but Athene, goddess and woman.

Within fifth century specificity, "The Oresteia" is

concerned with barbarity which is tamed, wickedness which is forgiven, suffering which is relieved. Within universal terms, it is, also, concerned with war, and its effect upon the non-combatants, and with the individual who is emotionally crippled by circumstances so that natural love turns to an unnatural hate. It is an examination of the dark side of the psyche, within an environment unfavourable to light -- "[It is] -- the most sustained analysis of human action in Greek tragedy". (Vickers, Brian (1973), p. 347).

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(i) Clytemnestra - - love is destroyed : hate destroyed

"Not only does she have the right of retaliation on her side, she is one of the towering figures in European drama, diabolic yet strangely touching as her ironies portray her here". (Fagles, Robert (1977), p. 31).

To categorise Clytemnestra and her actions as the epitome of evil is a superficiality which ignores the existence of any possible extenuating factors. It indicates a limited imaginative understanding of the motives behind the actions of one's fellows, a failure to comprehend the subtleties of the human character. It is a facile statement which accepts extremes, that there is black, there is white, there is nothing between, and which denies the presence of the complexities, the inherited traits, within the individual. It uncharitably rejects that environmental pressures may, also, have influenced the growth and direction of the persona, to its detriment.

This school of thought admits of no justification. Evaluated thus, Clytemnestra is a wicked woman, deserving of condemnation, but the creation of such a blackened image would turn the tragedy into melodrama and produce reactions equally

superficial. This trilogy has far too much emotive and spiritual strength for the simplistic interpretation of Clytemnestra-as-villainess. It is because her complicated character is universally recognizable and the rationale behind her bizarre activities comprehensible that her reality has retained its power. As she takes her first step into a self-contrived hell, the initial impression may be antipathetic. However, the certitude of the continuing journey into degradation and destruction, the certitude of emotional and ~~emo~~ mental unbalance as the situation becomes obsessive demands, surely, an awesome, objective pity rather than an unfeeling rejection.

The original audience would have been aware of this woman's history prior to the events recounted in the tragedy, and would have been influenced, accordingly, in their opinion of the character. The modern audience will base its evaluation solely upon the text. It will realise that, alive or dead, Clytemnestra's presence dominates, until the power of Athene overwhelms her and exorcises her, by now, malignant influence. Although not the protagonist at any time, she is the central catalytic force, the gods' agent of destruction and her own agent of self-annihilation. An emotional woman who lives by extremes; she either loves or hates. There is no halfway point, no mean of feeling. Such a one is bound to cause discord, to hurt others and to give pain to herself. She has a character of masculine strength, and deliberately transgresses the accepted female role. She is anti-patriarchal and, thus, tends towards abnormal social behaviour. She is proud, independent, intelligent and lusts for power. She is everything that a fifth century Athenian female should not be.

During any absence of the tribal leader from his oikos, its management and the responsibility for its economic well-being rested with his wife. For ten years, Clytemnestra held this position of surrogate ruler, finding satisfaction in the practice of power, of masculinity, but dissatisfaction in the denial of her sexual appetite. Like her sister, Helen, similarly endowed with copulative instincts, she found consolation elsewhere, with her husband's cousin, and sworn enemy. Aegisthus was a cunning but easily manipulated weakling, and dominated by her increasingly masculine tendencies. This deliberate insult to her king and his people fulfilled her psychological need to punish him for the length of time for which she had been alone. Governed by self-will and self-interest, all her actions were contrary to social expectation. She was like a spoilt, hurt child who, spitefully, seeks to hit back, with disastrous results. Aeschylus' skill in the presentation of this psychologically-sick woman is, it is felt, more capable of appreciation by a modern audience than by his contemporaries. There, the object of the study was as a warning to men against the dangers arising from women's interfering activities. Today, social change and a familiarity with mental-emotional illness, allows a more sympathetic understanding to be given to a character whose atypical behaviour is the result, to some extent, of actions originating with others, but, mostly, of her own personality, moulded by inheritance and environment.

The fact that love is essential to the satisfactory growth of the personality cannot be stated too often, or too strongly. Emotional trauma will result if the loved one is proved to be false, dishonest and unfaithful. The need to

protect the self-image, to maintain the equilibrium of the identity within the environment, to assuage the hurt pride, will produce a psychological rejection of the formerly-loved in the form of an antipathy, leading to dislike and the possibility of the most damaging of all emotions, hate, and its servant, revenge.

One assumes that love, in some form, existed originally between the queen and her husband. When she understands that he has sacrificed a beloved daughter, Iphigenia, at the behest of Artemis, so that, most ironically, the lengthy war should be allowed to start, the shock of such a loss denies the existence of a rational cause and, immediately, condemns. Love becomes disbelief and dislike, to be transformed easily to hate, an emotion fuelled by Aegisthus who obviously sees here a ready-made tool for his own, personal and long-standing revenge. Her absorption in the management of the oikos is a substitute for loss; her relationship with Aegisthus, a deliberate action of hurt to Agamemnon. The deeper she becomes involved in schemes of power, which satisfy her own need for vengeance, and satisfy Aegisthus even more, the greater her self-pity as self-excuse, and the greater her involvement in lust as a substitute for love. There is always hope, however, that any latent feeling of goodwill for her husband will be re-born when he, eventually, comes home. Unfortunately, he does not return alone, but accompanied by his concubine, who is to be given ready access to the family-hearth. The resurgence of affection which has been felt when he first appears, victorious, changes to an active hatred when the implication of Cassandra's presence is realised. Agamemnon's power to retain love is as insubstantial as that of his brother, Menelaus, but, unlike



his brother, the pride of a jealous and rejected woman will destroy him.

Clytemnestra's natural love for Iphigenia becomes obsessive and exaggerated when she is murdered, to the growing exclusion of her other children from her affections. Orestes she fears and sends away, as a child, ostensibly for his safety, in actuality, for her own. Electra is rejected, in favour of the lover. Both actions reap their own dreadful result. Both actions have a basis in psychological illness, for where the male characteristic is allowed to be the woman's motivating force, her maternal role becomes disoriented. The instincts of motherhood were, therefore, distorted -- loving the dead, ignoring the living -- creating a mental sickness in the children which was similar to that of her own. Lack of mutual affection breeds the familiar pattern growing towards hatred. Any action is acceptable if it will hurt the one who has given so much pain. Once again, the blindness of pride and the absence of an understanding charity are the governing factors.

Overshadowing this, not unfamiliar, story of family dissension and deliberate cruelty, a microcosmic war, lies the presence of the larger conflict. However distant in physical terms, its effect is ever-present as an evil power. It initiates Clytemnestra's cancerous bitterness against her husband, a sentiment which is reinforced by his return with Cassandra, his war-booty. It allows her to experience the drug of power which activates her latent masculinity, a power which she is reluctant to relinquish. It creates a sexual hunger which she satisfies with the wrong person for the wrong reasons. It destroys her relationship with her children who are, thus, psychologically injured. It destroys

her humanity completely, and the balance is finally lost by the shock and disbelief at Orestes' determined act of revenge. In death, this unquiet spirit, having lost all instinct of love, madly incites the Erinyes to kill her son, insanelly demanding blood for blood, a perversion of justice, as the whole latter part of her life has been a perversion of the good and honourable - the antithesis of love and peace. "Some applaud her resolution; but others hold that she brought eternal disgrace upon all women, even virtuous ones".  
(Graves, Robert. (1955), p. 54).

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Agamemnon is the traditional central character of the first play, the tragic hero who is destroyed. Clytemnestra, however, creates her own dominance of this part. Within but few lines of the prologue, we are aware of her "male strength of heart" (L.10)<sup>1</sup>, a fact which is disapproved of as a cause of oikos' malfunctioning. The presence is established. Audience expectation is fulfilled by her entrance, but she remains silent until L.264, listening to the bitter story of Iphigenia's murder -- " -- the secret anger remembers the child that shall be avenged" (L.155) -- The brilliance of this artistic device both creates tension - how is she going to react? - and sympathy for a mother's suffering at the hands of a perverted father. She makes no comment; her feelings are hidden; she is in full control of herself and the situation. Troy has fallen and the king is coming home. She will greet him with love for -- " -- what else/is light more sweet for woman to behold than this" (Ls.601-2). Is it sincere? Her people know that she has "broken the seal" (L.610). The intended ambiguity of her words increases our attention. Is this woman as bad as she

1. Aeschylus 1. Ag. pp. 35-90. (Greene and Lattimore, 1953).

appears to be or is she poised between a remembered past and an uncertain future? Is it possible that the former love may be re-awakened and the present physical satisfaction discarded? This is her husband, a victorious warrior. Has she forgiven him? Whatever her inner feelings, whatever the hope, which she may have entertained that love and peace within the oikos might be restored, is all rendered void by Agamemnon, himself, who returns, not alone, but accompanied by his female prize-of-war.

Although concubinage was a socially accepted fact, the presence, at ~~that~~ particular emotional moment, of the partner of her husband's unfaithfulness was the motivation which turned dislike into a calculated hatred. "I take no shame to speak aloud before you all/the love I bear my husband". (Ls.856-7) is the mockery of an experienced actress. With bitter irony, he is greeted as "the watchdog of the fold and hall" (L.896) and is tempted to walk upon the treasures of the oikos -- " -- one of the most magnificent examples of the non-verbal in the theatre". (Kott, Jan (1971) T.Q. p.5) It is a delight to encourage him to exercise his pride, when it is known that hubris receives the certainty of punishment from the gods. It is a delight to show him the beauty of the oikos' riches, guarded, maintained, extended through her efforts, her careful husbandry. It is a delight, now, to fulfil the idea of destruction which has been generating for so long. This destruction will, of course, include Cassandra. "From us you shall have all you have the right to ask". (L.1046) and will, through the murder of Apollo's priestess, increase her guilt. The audience would have shivered at the horror of such a sacrilegious deed, anticipating the punishment which must follow; and they

shiver again when the skene door opens to reveal the slaughtered/<sup>victims</sup>and the triumphantly blood-shrouded Clytemnestra, who proudly proclaims full responsibility for what they see. Cold-blooded murder has destroyed morality. She is sure in the rightness of her self-justification, accepting no blame, afraid of no threat. It was right that he should expiate Iphigenia's premature death. It was right that she should be the hand of justice. Then she betrays herself. Perhaps, in time, she could have forgiven the hurt of the dead child, but the living woman displayed before her was an unforgivable humiliation which hurt her pride. "Their reward is not/unworthy. He lies there; and she who swanlike cried/aloud her lyric mortal lamentation out/is laid against his fond heart, and to me has given/a delicate excitement to my bed's delight". (Ls.1443-7). She is, indeed, sick, for perversion is a sign of mental unbalance, and because she is sick and one is observing the condition of one unfortunate being with the eyes of security, security in one's own sanity, one can begin to feel pity for that which is irreparable. Aeschylus is very skilful.

The woman's pain, temporarily submerged in blood-letting, is re-awakened and the wound of Iphigenia opens again. She cannot forgive, in any case it is too late, but the child will be in the nether-world to welcome him -- " -- his child, who else,/shall greet her father by the whirling stream/and the ferry of tears/to close him in her arms and kiss him". (Ls.1556-9). Revenge is justified, blood has been spilled and now there will be peace -- "I will take some small/measure of our riches, and be content/that I swept from these halls/the murder, the sin, and the fury". (Ls.1574-6) - the ultimate irony, for her

guilt and her fear of the future will remain her constant companions.

Some twelve years later, this presence is still with her. The dead king is waiting to be avenged, and she knows this. She is estranged from her daughter and frightened of the possibility of Orestes' return. Her people mistrust her; the house is filled with suspicion -- "O hearth soaked in sorrow, / O wreckage of a fallen house". (Ls. 49-50)<sup>1</sup> The nights are disturbed by terrible dreams in which the figure of Orestes predominates. Yet, when he does, in reality, appear, she fails to recognize him and, with unconscious irony, offers the traditional hospitality of the house -- " -- tell me only what you would have, and it is yours" (L. 668) - the good and civilised hostess, acting her part in an attempt at normality. She needs this skill even more when she learns of Orestes' assumed death -- " -- to strip unhappy me of all I ever loved". (L. 695). Is she genuine? In the relief of presumed safety, does she find a fragment of natural affection left? Electra's existence, it will be noted, is ignored. There is little apparent sign of grief and the hostess' duties take precedence over the effect of the news. She has satisfactorily eliminated the power of maternal love from her life.

Whatever hesitation Orestes might have had in killing his mother will have been overcome not only by her wholly unnatural reaction to his death, but by her failure of recognition, instinctive, motherly, loving recognition. Her self-absorbed blindness denies peace for her son and will lead to war upon herself. Orestes wastes no time; Aegisthus is rapidly disposed of and by an extraordinarily dramatic realisation of truth, Clytemnestra sees that her

1. Aeschylus I. L.B. pp. 93-131. (Crane and Latimore, 1953).

dream is becoming actuality. The deception, the knowledge of her own imminent death induces a moment of madness, against her child -- "Bring me quick, somebody, an ax to kill a man". (L.889) Rapidly regaining control, she realizes that she has no physical chance against two men, but the possibility of reprieve through the pleading persuasion of her superior wit. Unfortunately, Pylades, coldly observant, has no filial tie with her and reminds the hesitant Orestes of Apollo's edict. She is to die and, as Orestes logically tells her -- " -- It will be you who kill yourself. It will not be I" (L.923). As he sees it, a just retribution for a heinous murder.

God-driven to matricide, he becomes guilt-driven by the Erinyes, visible media of punishment, activated by the dreadful nature of his deed. Hounded by these monstrously ugly beings, female only in name, he becomes, once more, an outcast from his city, a man separated from his fellows; a man at variance with himself. From the spirit-world, the strength of Clytemnestra's hatred incites the Erinyes, vile reflections of what she has become, to yet greater efforts on her behalf -- " -- Let go/upon this man the stormblasts of your bloodshot breath/wither him in your wind, after him, hunt him down/once more and shrivel him in your vitals' heat and flame" (Ls.136-9)<sup>1</sup>. She has no pity, no remorse. She is obsessed, as she has been shown to be throughout, with herself -- her rights, her pain, her revenge. Pitiless, she can expect no pity any more from us, only the realisation of the destruction which can result where love is denied and the violence of hate is accepted.

The seed of love planted within the being grows and warms its surroundings, generating peace and justice. If

1. Aeschylus I.E. pp.135-171. (Greene and Lattimore, 1953).

the seed is destroyed, it leaves an empty space, waiting to be filled with all manner of evil things.

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(ii) Slaves : victims of war

Slavery was the expected and accepted fate of the conquered in any armed conflict. The potentially dangerous and the physically useless were massacred, but those able to work became a valuable economic commodity for the maintenance of standards in both state and home. Women formed the majority section of this labour-force and were recognized, along with objects of a more solid and material nature, as a part of the victors' gains of war. The more prestigious the conqueror, the more elevated the rank of his allotted conquest. Royalty, nobility became the property of men of equal position, but, as property, were forced to assume a status of compliant obedience, in which a most vital element, freedom, was missing. They were forcibly removed from the security of their homes, torn from parents, children, friends, to live in an environment of unsympathetic unfamiliarity, with those who had destroyed the safety of their lives. The more protected they had been, the more difficult was this radical re-adjustment; commanded, where they had been the commanders; powerless, where once they had held control.

Slaves, as a part of a man's capital assets, were, generally, well looked after and, in time, became satisfactorily integrated, as its principal work-force, into the life of the oikos. Sometimes, the woman's task included concubinage and the procreation of children for her master. She had, of course, no right of refusal and in a strangely

perverse way, she came to depend upon her master's protection, and even, to love him; the pleasure given came to be given freely.

The women, victims of war, knew what would happen to them if their men were defeated and they were left undefended. Of necessity, they came to accept the inevitability of an unpleasant future with dignity and courage, sustained by remembrance of the past, but appreciating the reality of the present.

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Cassandra, daughter of the conquered and murdered Priam, King of Troy, was the chosen prize of Agamemnon, who brought her back with him on his eventual return home. His choice was a most unfortunate one, for this was no ordinary woman but a religious dedicated to Apollo. Physical familiarity with her was, therefore, not only an act of sacrilege which would not go unnoticed by the god, but a gross intrusion into the particular nature of her role. Captive women expected rape as a matter of course. This woman had, ironically enough, already denied herself to the god, and been punished for her non-acquiescence. The punishment became cruelly completed when the man responsible for the destruction of her city and its people took her as his mistress. Whether, in conformity with other women in a similarly forced situation, she could have come to regard Agamemnon with affection is not clear. "She is like some captive animal". (L.1063)<sup>1</sup>. -- alone, frightened, tense with shock, physically and spiritually desecrated. She has no time in which to grow accustomed to her new position in society, for her arrival with the king, as his, obviously already-used possession, is the final motivating force which drives Clytemnestra towards the

1. Aeschylus I. Ag. pp. 35-40. (Grane and Lattimore, 1953).



irrevocable decision to kill. Jealousy of the rival who, tragically, does not wish to be a rival, is the cancerous emotional agent which destroys. If only the king had returned alone. Imbued with the smell of victory, filled with the pride of physical success, dominating by the actuality of his presence after such a lengthy absence, it is possible that there could have been a resurgence of Clytemnestra's latent love and a rejection of her determination to retain the power of rule. One look at the woman beside him obliterates any favourable emotion towards her husband, and includes Cassandra in the projected act of vengeance. Unlike the old men, who pity her, Clytemnestra has no compassion for the slave, fallen so far from the protection of her social role. "You," she says, bitingly, "if you are obeying my commands at all, be quick". (L.1059) -- and go inside, towards a violent and loveless, and wholly unnecessary end.

Able to see into the past, having the facility to interpret the present, foretelling the future, Cassandra is the dramatic medium reinforcing the audience's knowledge of previous events and preparing it for the ensuing murders. With a powerful imagery, the slaughter is pre-created in the mind. Her clarity of vision becomes a shared experience. Full of terror and pain, she can already feel -- "the sheer edge of the tearing iron". (L.1149), as we, too, experience -- " -- mortal pain at the trebled song of your agony/shivers the heart to hear". (Ls.1165-6) She has been the pivotal point from which the precariously balanced decision of choice has fallen towards the pit of evil, dragging her, innocent and lost, with it. She is the voice which preaches of the dangers of hatred and vengeance, a never-ending process of

evil -- "Hanging above the hall they chant their song of hate/and the old sin" (Ls.1191-2) - of the certitude of discord and suffering, from which there is no escape, when love and peace are rejected. The voice is not understood "What is to come will come. And soon you too will stand/beside, to murmur in pity that my words were true". (Ls.1240-41).

Isolated by the special nature of her gift, friendless and unprotected, traumatised by defeat and the despoliation of her virginity -- "one simple slave who died, a small thing, lightly killed" (L.1326), she, yet has the courage of necessity; the necessity to warn, not only the actors but the audience of the danger contained within the aggressive and loveless action, which can easily destroy the safe equilibrium of the state.

A young woman, going to her known death, feels compassion for man's stupidity, and the ephemeral nature of his existence, for -- " -- one stroke of a wet sponge wipes all the picture out". (L.1329).

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#### The slave women and Electra

Where Cassandra is the archetypal victim of slavery at its potential worst, the Chorus, the libation-bearers of the second part of the trilogy, find strength in the unanimity of their experience. Where Cassandra, psychologically disorientated, becomes the victim of her situation, the Chorus control their emotions in order to manipulate those of others. Where Cassandra reveals an objective pity and the ability to forgive, the Chorus maintain the atmosphere of hatred through an incitement towards an unforgiving violence. Whether these women were, also, victims of the Trojan defeat

is not clear; they were, nonetheless, all slaves, and serve to represent the dichotomous effect of such a radical change in the life-style. Cassandra, virginal, innocent, compliantly accepting of her fate is the sacrifice. The Chorus, more maturely experienced, accept their status because there is no other choice, but are filled with the acerbity of revenge, in an environment constant in its retention of hatred -- "sunless and where men fear to walk". (L.51)<sup>1</sup> L.B. -- which serves to strengthen their own feelings of repulsion and disgust, and their determination to bring added discord to the house which is their prison.

Electra is a ready tool, herself a slave to circumstances. Rejected by her mother, her emotional growth stunted and soured by the loss of maternal love, she becomes obsessively involved with memories of the dead father and the absent brother; the intangible, the unobtainable, the imagined good becomes substitutes for the bitter reality of a present in which a thwarted natural affection has turned into a brooding hate, exacerbated by a corrosive jealousy for Aegisthus, not, because he is a substitute for her father, but, because she has been replaced by him in her relationship with her mother.

She is as isolated within herself as Cassandra, but, whereas the latter accepts the inevitable with a courageous strength, Electra's self-concern shows an increasing psychological unbalance, a perversion of normal instincts and the directing of the will towards evil. She is emotionally suggestible and a pliable weapon ready for manipulation by any external controlling influence.

The slaves cannot risk a direct act of revenge, but can use the disturbed girl to fulfil their need for the

1. Aeschylus T. L. B. pp. 62-63 (Grove and Lattimore 1952)

aggressive action. Proclaiming an ambiguous loyalty to the murdered king - was the sentiment real, a vocalisation of the attachment which the slave was supposed to feel for the master, or an adroit deception to encourage trust? Pretending a supportive friendship, they cleverly lead her, step by psychological step, towards the thought of Orestes, the traditional kinship-avenger, as the active medium of violence, so that, when he does eventually appear, all her emotional frustration has been motivated towards this one end. Here is the saviour who will put all to rights. Here is the one person upon whom all the pent-up love can be lavished. Such a love, however, such a torrent of sick feeling can only create a highly-charged tension, a pseudo-spirituality, divorced from reality, but of just the right temperature to stimulate a decision of dangerous irrationality.

The brother and sister, thinking themselves to be in control of the situation, are as puppets in the hands of the manipulators. Grouped around Agamemnon's tomb, they invoke his spirit-aid, an incantatory trio of dramatic power. The Chorus' insidious incitement to violence, couched in the familiar socio-religious concepts of right and justice, have an hypnotic influence which is similar to witchcraft, and as evil -- "But the stroke of the twofold lash is pounding/close, and powers gather under ground/to give aid. The hands of those who are lords/are unclean, and these are accursed/Power grows on the side of the children". (Ls.375-9) Electra is especially susceptible to this psychological manoeuvre. The atmosphere of the place, the emotion of the recent reunion, the compulsive tempo of the incantation, orchestrated with such skill by the Chorus, lead

her towards the brink of mental instability -- "May Zeus, from all shoulder's strength/pound down his fist upon them/ohay, smash their heads". (Ls.394-6) -- in statements of ever-increasing bloodthirsty irrationality. However noble Orestes' original, god-directed intention may have been, his sister's uncontrolled hatred, fuelled by the Chorus, excludes love and compassion and focusses him wholly upon the violence of revenge. The Chorus keep the temperature high -- "We gather into murmurous revolt. Hear/us, hear. Come back into the light./Be with us against those we hate" (Ls.458-60). Electra, with tragic irony donning her mother's mantle, prays for the strength to kill Aegisthus, herself. The decision has been made.

Electra, her task of supportive persuasion complete, waits for the pleasurable vision of the newly-dead. The Chorus continue to justify the course of the action, the right of revenge -- "Right's anvil stands staunch on the ground/and the smith, Destiny, hammers out the sword./Delayed in glory, pensive from/the murk. Vengeance brings home at last/a child, to wipe out the stain of blood shed long ago". (Ls.646-51). Both in speech and action, they continue to ensure that the tension of expectation is maintained, that nothing should interfere with the certainty of the end. By waylaying Cilissa, one of the few natural and balanced people in the trilogy and Euripidean in character, they make quite certain that Aegisthus will be as unprotected in death as was Agamemnon. Far from those whom they have loved, in an alien land, they can but hope that this final shedding of blood will bring peace to the adopted home, through the new ruler -- "-- our man will kindle a flame/and light of liberty" (Ls.863-4). Sadly, they make the same mistaken

assumption as did Clytemnestra - that once the dragon's teeth have been sown, they continue to flourish, nurtured by man, himself.

The slave, Cassandra, finds her own form of peace in death and will rejoin those whom she loves. She accepts her fate without animosity. Electra, slave of her emotions and her environment, is denied love and, in punishing those who have neglected and pained her, kills her inner peace and chooses the substitutes of hate and violence. The slave-women, with love only as a memory, are interned in an atmosphere of emotional conflict, where revenge is the motivating factor. In adopting the mores of their masters, they are reduced to their level. Love grows weaker and a longed-for peace is destroyed in bloodshed.

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(iii) Athene, goddess of wisdom

Throughout the trilogy, the principal woman characters fulfilled their fifth century didactic function. Their disastrous activities, motivated by an emotionalism which was synonymous with irrationality, were a dramatic warning to men, controlled by their reason, of the dangers of, firstly, having women in positions of power, and, secondly, of the effect of their unstable behaviour upon the fate of those around them. Within the context of these plays, it is the women who were responsible for the continuing practice of the concept of retributive justice, a concept which had become unacceptable in a state dedicated to the democratic ideal.

In order to resolve this continuum of conflict, Aeschylus used this political ideal, both as illustration of its possibilities and as a means of glorifying his city. Athens, in the person of Athene, brings peace and order to

replace the, apparently, irresolvable -- the disorder and discord, the bitterness of vengeance, the weight of guilt. In this way, the dramatist satisfies three functions: he glorifies democracy, he shows the nature and value of a compassionate peace as an essential element in the social structure, and he provides a spectacularly beautiful and moving ending, of spiritual power. Without such a resolution, the audience would be left in an emotional hiatus of doubt and dissatisfaction, without hope, because of man's apparent inability to control his baser instincts.

At the play's commencement, the malevolent presence of the female Erinyes, desecrating the Delphic temple, epitomises the evil engendered by women, in the previous two sections. They sustain the atmosphere of vengeful hatred which has been established. They represent a form of dreadful and eternal punishment for the unforgivable social action. By the conclusion, they have become transformed into spirits of goodwill and protection, encouraging plenty and bringing prosperity to the people. They have been changed by the wise persuasiveness of the goddess -- "if you hold Persuasion has her sacred place/of worship, in the sweet beguilement of my voice,/then you might stay with me". (Ls.885-6)<sup>1</sup>, whose compassionate regard for their humiliation in defeat, her patience and non-condemnatory approach, her forgiving understanding, all combine to encourage the metamorphosis of evil into good, and, practically, to civilise and institutionalise the idea and application of justice.

"I think you will have your way with me. My hate is going". (L.900). Violence has been exchanged for wise discussion, rational speech for irrational deeds. Instead

of conflict -- "the sun's bright magnificence shall break out  
wave/on wave, of all the happiness/life can give, across  
their land". (Ls.924-6). Instead of hate -- "Let love be  
their common will" (Ls.958)

Woman-the-destroyer, victim of fate, has become  
woman-the-redeemer, agent of the gods, for from wisdom, peace  
will come, and in peace, love will flourish within, and  
between, people. The message is of universal relevance.

"Singing all follow our footsteps". (L.1047)



## Chapter 2 - Sophocles

### a) Love and devotion - women's relationships with men

#### (i) Ajax

"If it could be said of any play of Sophocles that this is not a good play, but it is a great one, "Ajax" could be it".  
(Lattimore, Richmond, (1958), p. 80).

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Although considered to be the earliest surviving play, "Ajax" was, in fact, a work of the dramatist's middle-age, representative of a developed theatrical form. The existence of the largest number of manuscript copies of any play has led to the assumption that it was the most popular of all ~~at least~~ during the Byzantine Age; understandably, for the plot follows the accepted model, of the admired, primeval folk-figure, whose character-flaw leads to his downfall. Homer's picture of Ajax as the greatest warrior after Achilles, and his subsequent adoption by the Athenians as a cult-hero, demanded moral rehabilitation for the fallen one. Sophocles filled this need by the inclusion of a persuasive agon of justification which further satisfied his audience and ensured its popularity, as intellectual stimulation. Personal dishonour, the right of choice, civic belief and custom were, and are, subjects of a universal interest.

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The context of the play is one of a violence which has discoloured the past and infiltrated the present. The bestiality of a protracted war has filled the surroundings with its influence of potential evil, fertilising existing controversies, and encouraging irrationality in word and deed. The gods in the person of Athena, whose wisdom should

have directed her in more rational paths, chose this moment to punish the hero, who had a record of hubristic behaviour demanding chastisement, and thus added to an already tense situation.

Tecmessa... the slave

Within this environment in which self-interest was the dominating force, lived Tecmessa of Phrygia, daughter of Teleutas, a wealthy nobleman, with her son, Eurysaces, child of Ajax. She was a slave, a war-prize, and the warrior's woman, reduced from a life of privilege and comfort to one of servitude and hardship. From her behaviour one can adjudge that she was, evidently, of noble birth. One can only assume how she was captured and how long she had been exposed to the hazards of a soldier's life, long enough to bear a child, perhaps some five or six years old. A woman, a captive thrust into a strongly male community, undefended save by her own integrity. The warm security of her former life must have become dreamlike in her memory.

After the initial shock of such a radical change of living-conditions, it is understandable how any kindness which the man showed to his woman would, eventually, be reciprocated and develop from a mutual regard into a relationship of loving care. The woman accepted the man's domination with his protection. In return, she gave him her devotion. The man came to regard his woman as a precious possession, in her own right, not just as a prize of war. The nature of the emotional connection between Ajax and Tecmessa is implied in the text rather than overtly expressed. It is a feeling, an impression, an influence which is diffused throughout the action - - that right will have its way in the end, through the power of love.

The play begins with physical violence, instigated by a deranged Ajax and ends, over his dead body with an agon of potential violence, resolved pacifically by rational discussion. Perhaps, Athena was exerting her off-stage wisdom, at last. Between these two extremes, Tecmessa appears transitorily, but with dramatic effect; even her silent presence is a device of emotional importance. She is the only woman in the play, surrounded by men whose roles in the past have been one of active conflict. Yet, by the dramatist's skill in characterisation and his observational accuracy, this woman fills the scene with the warmth of her humanity, never overwhelmed by either environment or circumstance.

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Whatever happiness she has managed to find with Ajax, during the war, becomes fragile and about to be broken when she wakes one morning to a scene of carnage within the tent and her man, apparently insane. She is intelligent and aware of the tenuous nature of her position in the camp. The scene is not only terrible in itself, but in its implication for her future. Outside are sailors, loyal to Ajax, "-who care for him" (L.204)<sup>1</sup>, to whom she confides her grief and horror. These are no courtiers, but tough men from Salamis. Although a slave, they treat her with regard and a respect which says much for the impression which she makes upon those around her, and which she has made upon the choleric Ajax -- "For the valiant Ajax loves you/And honours his spear-won bride." (Ls.211-12) She recounts what she has seen, with a detail which shows the strength of her courage. Here is no weak woman who will run screaming from the tent, arousing the camp, but one who circumspectly and wisely will

1. Sophocles II. pp. 7-62 (Grune and Lattimore, 1957).

seek counsel only from those whom she can trust. The respect and trust are mutual. They all realise what this will mean to Ajax - "For an awful thing to be near is the doom that holds him" (L.254) - and their reaction is one of care and not repugnance. Tecmessa, with the pain of the loving for the loved, tells them that with the restoration of sanity, realisation of the deed has come upon Ajax -- " -- It is a painful thing/To look at your own trouble and know/That you yourself and no one else has made it" (Ls.259-61) - and his pain augments her own. She remembers how she had tried to stop him from leaving her side, intuitively sensing danger and wishing to protect him, and of how he spurned her - "in a well-worn phrase,/'Woman, a woman's decency is silence'" (Ls.292-3) - When he does allow her to speak, it is to force her to tell him of all that she has, so dreadfully, witnessed.

She asks for their help, perhaps their physical presence will aid Ajax, when they become aware of his cries of anguish, calling for his son. Tecmessa's fear increases; is the child to be his next victim? Shall she obey him, or not? The sight of him is stronger than her fear. She does not lament, even when he talks of suicide, but begs for a return to rationality, and if he persists in his wish, then her love is such that -- "When you pray that prayer, why, pray for my death too;/Why should I live when once my lord is dead?" (Ls.392-3). The dishonour is unbearable to him. He is hated by gods, Greeks and Trojans - "It's a contemptible thing to want to live forever/When a man's life gives him no relief from trouble". (Ls.473-4). It is better to leave the world. Self-pity is destructive and they beg Ajax to reconsider. Tecmessa, fearless of his wrath and guided by

her affection, endeavours to persuade him to stay with them all. By the gods' will, she has become a slave and accepted this fact, growing to honour and respect the master to whom, she knows, she has brought peace and contentment. Will he purposely destroy her security, allow his woman and his child to become objects of contempt to the enemy? Will he wilfully bring disgrace upon his people? Emotionally tense, yet intellectually struggling to retain her hold upon the situation, she uses all her power of inducement, of psychological manipulation, to give him logical grounds for a change of heart. He has a duty to his parents, to his child, and to herself, to remain alive -- "You are my only safety. O my lord,/Remember even me. A man ought to remember/If he has experienced any gentle thing./Kindness it is that brings forth kindness always" (Ls.519-22). Ingratitude is, indeed, dishonourable. Her assumed self-pity is a tool of persuasion, not a cry for survival. It is love, and not self, talking. For one moment, there seems to be a possibility that she has succeeded. The child, who has been carefully protected from danger by his mother, is brought to him; even now, she wonders as to his safety.. She fears even more when she understands that Ajax' decision is irrevocable. He is too proud to accept a woman's advice. She remains outside his door, waiting, and communicating her tension to the audience.

When he returns and she hears his words of reprieve -- "My speech is womanish for this woman's sake;/And pity touches me for wife and child,/widowed and lost among my enemies" (Ls.652-4). Her relief, our relief fills the theatre with a relaxed sigh. All will, after all, be well -- "You, my wife, go in/And fervently and continually pray

the gods/To grant fulfilment of my soul's desire" (Ls.683-5), calming their fears, shielding them with ambiguity : and, yet, doubt remains. This is not the kind of man to be won over so easily - but, one capable of deception in order to attain his desired goal. Although temporarily relieved, Tecmessa's appreciation of the reality of Ajax' intentions almost anticipates the arrival of fresh bad news. Ajax has disappeared.

Calchas, the prophet, has foretold his doom. Teucer, a possible saviour, has not yet arrived to help. Calmly, courageously, and with an intelligent resourcefulness, Tecmessa organises her sailor-friends into search-parties, and goes herself -- " -- to save a man that's bent on death" (L.812). She finds him, and it is too late. With loving care, she protects him. He is to be remembered in his warrior's strength, not as a bloody corpse. She laments with all the pain and loneliness of her situation, for her lost love, for her insecure future. She realises that it is the gods' will. She is proud in her grief, glad that he has -- " -- won his great desire, the death he looked for". (L.973). She forgets the safety of the child, who has been left in the care of attendants while his mother searched for her husband. Teucer reminds her, and with renewed anguish, she hurries away to fetch him. Teucer has promised to look after the boy, but there has been no mention of herself. What will become of her? She does not complain, thinking of the child.

When she returns, it is to find tht Teucer has been involved in argument with Menelaus who refuses burial to Ajax' body. Here is a fresh burden, fresh pain. Without the proper rituals due to the dead, the spirit will not rest

in peace. This is a deliberately vindictive injury, most painful to bear. Teucer is the protector, but will he be able to withstand the violent antagonism of Ajax' enemies? She sits quietly, patiently, by the body, her son beside her, thinking of the past, fearful for the future, listening to the men's voices as they exchange insults, praying for the safety of her man's spirit. The gods relent, the impasse is resolved and Ajax is carried away for burial, followed by his friends, his son and his devoted wife. [Technically, the deuteragonist, playing Odysseus as well as Tecmessa, would have left the orchestra at L.989. The player who re-enters at L.1170, and who does not speak again, is an extra, wearing the Tecmessa mask].

In terms of plot-structure, there is no need for Tecmessa to be in the play at all. The insanity, the suicide of the dishonoured and the subsequent agon upon the subject of burial could have proceeded without a woman's presence. It would, however, have produced an intellectual exercise, with some emotional overtones, instead of a work of art, of lasting value. Tecmessa brings a warm and pitying care to her relationships with those with whom she is in contact. Her loyalty and bravery, her intelligent awareness bring her the respect and regard of her fellows. A noblewoman of foreign birth, reduced to a role of humiliating powerlessness, she adapts to her new life with courage and resourcefulness. She acquires true nobility which adds to her stature. Above all, the love which she feels and which she, in turn, inspires in others, influences not only the whole atmosphere of the play but the reactions of the audience, so that it, too, becomes wholly involved in a beneficial experience.

The aftermath of a protracted war encouraged the bitterness of rivalry and an aggressive hatred. Within this environment, Sophocles showed that it was possible for love to flourish, with its own kind of inner peace, and that this love, as an influence for good, came through the agency of one brave, loyal and noble woman - - Tecmessa, the image of a caring devotion.

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(ii) The Women of Trachis

This particular story of Heracles, the demi-god, and physical champion of good against evil, deals with his, most unpleasant, death at the hands of a woman. This was the greatest dishonour that a man could experience. The unfortunate woman was his wife, Deianeira, who loved him dearly. It is an example of Zeus' power of destruction, even for his son, and his use of a woman as a tool. It is an example of the power of prophecy and its accurate fulfilment. Both these factors would concern the Athenian audience, enforcing awareness of the external forces which had overall control. Its universal interest, however, lies in an examination of an individual's behaviour as it affects inter-relationships, and especially, the result of actions which stem from the irrational.

The customary belief that woman equals emotion and man equals reason is reversed in this play, for the woman expresses her feelings but is capable of a control which enables her to evaluate a situation rationally. Tragedy comes to her when emotional need is too strong and she acts with unreason. Her men, on the other hand, act and speak with a lack of reason which is pitiless and ruinous. Emotional self-interest leads to Heracles' fall; an



impulsive and over-hasty judgment helps his mother towards her death and leaves Hyllus with an unrelieved and terrible burden of guilt.

There is a tendency for academic opinion to regard this work as divided into two distinct, and separated, parts; one, relating to Deianeira and the other to Heracles. This is a curious misunderstanding of the dramatic function. The form of the audience-involvement generated by the actions of the former is carried over, colours and is, indeed, essential to the understanding of the reactions of the latter. Even though no longer present, the power of Deianeira's feeling permeates the whole. The silent character, whether on-or off-stage, whose personality is so strong that it can be felt as a tangible influence, is a dramatic device of considerable emotive value. Tecmessa, it will be remembered, remains mute during the latter half of her tragedy, but, in the hands of the right artist, her unspoken grief and suspense will serve to increase audience readiness for a shared experience.

Sophocles' choice of this particularly unpleasant episode in the saga of Heracles, involving torture, both physical and mental, was unexpected. Subsequent academic critics have even doubted the authenticity of authorship. W.N. Bates<sup>72</sup> and R.C. Jebb<sup>12</sup>, while not disputing the play's merit or the fact that it is Sophocles' work, cite controversy as to its artistic value and to its evaluation as immature and imperfect. Admittedly, the theme is not an agreeable one -- "Oedipus Tyrannus" is even less agreeable, both morally and physically -- but through the dramatist's skill, it acquires the status of a work of art. Heracles' ruin, which was god-willed and oracularly pre-determined,

illustrated, to the satisfaction of the artist's contemporaries, the inability of man to contest the external powers. The manner of his dying, which was occasioned by a woman's act of irrationality, also fulfilled public expectation. As a work of universal relevance, it shows how love can destroy, the loving and the loved, if reason is overwhelmed by uncontrolled emotion.

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Deianeira, the wife

-- recognized by general consent as one of the most delicately beautiful creations in literature". (Jebb, R.C. (1892) p. xxxi).

The presence of a supportive female chorus is indicative of the importance which Sophocles attached to his creation of Deianeira. The fact that she committed suicide by the sword, a wholly masculine action, and alien to such an essentially feminine woman, gives rise to the suspicion that she was intended as a, if not the, hero-figure, whose fall comes about because of the one fatal, uncharacteristic action -- when the necessity for immediacy overcame the sanity of forethought. Heracles' translation to Olympus to Olympus was predestined. Deianeira's death resulted from herself.

The dramatist's sympathetic observation of women and his ability to convey this in the presentation of the realistic characterisation is reminiscent of Euripides' skill in this area, a skill which may, perhaps, have had an influence upon Sophocles' own development.

Deianeira is revealed as the exceptional wife of an exceptional warrior. He was a physical and emotional man whose infrequent visits to his scattered family usually led to the procreation of a new member rather than to the governance of his home, left, as was expected, to the care of

his wife. She was accustomed to lengthy periods of separation, in which she knew neither of his whereabouts nor of his continued presence in the world. She was used to self-dependence and the comfort of, possibly exaggerated, memories, which fed her love for the absent husband. She understood the priority which he gave to his allotted tasks, and accepted her secondary, and physically insecure role with a patient understanding. She did not allow herself the panacea of self-pity and, through the control of her reason, developed a compassionate wisdom in her relationships with others. She does not appear to have been jealous or possessive. Heracles was unfaithful; that was expected and accepted until Iole, the Oechalian, came into her life, her husband's current obsession and his captive. A wife was inured to co-habitation with a concubine and, yet, in this instance, she became fearful of her security and sought a desperate measure as a means of reviving the man's desire for her -- the last frightened attempt of a middle-aged woman to defeat the attractions of youth. Added to this, was the conjunction of two other factors, the imminence of the warrior's return, overshadowed by the knowledge of the oracle's prophecy. Even without the existence of Iole, Deianeira was in a state of tension, liable to take the uncharacteristic action. That such a woman should indulge in love-potions was a sign of her temporary unbalance. That such a woman, loving so dearly, so unselfishly, should be subjected to the knowledge of the result of her action was an example of the god's dispassionate cruelty. When she dies it is with nobility and a man's courage : extraordinary circumstances breed the exceptional deed. One is reminded of Clytemnestra similarly humiliated by the presence of the

returning warrior's mistress, and one compares the growth of her hatred with the strength of Deianeira's love. She sends her gift, hoping for a full reconciliation. She never sees her husband again. He speaks to her, with the brutality of desperation, across a chasm of misunderstanding. She dies alone, but the influence of her love remains. "In Deianeira, Sophocles has drawn one of his most complete and convincing characters, and yet all we know of her is her single-minded devotion to her husband." (Watling, E.F. (1953) pp. 10-11).

With perceptive skill, the dramatist has created a woman, whose unegoistical attachment to her man is universally recognizable as a model for other women.

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~~Centrally~~ to action. The play is opened by Deianeira, establishing, at once, the dramatist's intention to emphasise the character, and communicating her loving anxiety for her husband and her own loneliness. Not only does she not know where he is, but she fears the imminent fulfilment of a doom-filled prophecy. The safety of the household is dependent upon his protection, without him they are lost, for "His ruin is ours". (L.85)<sup>1</sup>. During his prolonged absence, the burden of responsibility lies upon her and begins to weigh her down. The young women, her companions, however warm their sympathy, cannot fully understand the constant worry for the security of the present and the fear for the uncertainty of the future. They do not understand the power of love and the pain of separation -- "-- to think that I may have to live/deprived of the one man who is the finest of all" (Ls.176-7). If all goes well, it may be possible for them to live together in peace, at last, but her intuitive dread is stronger than her hope. When the

1. Sophocles II, pp. 73-119 (Greene and Lattimore, 1957).

garlanded messenger, bringer of good news, arrives, she continues in a state of questioning tension. Eventually satisfied, she is overcome with the joy of relief. The Chorus, reflections of her emotions, sing their paean of jubilation. He is coming home. Lichas, the herald, confirms his well-being. The ominous time-limit indicated by the oracle must have passed without danger. All will be well, but one must remain calmly realistic, for the gods are watching and -- "one knows a feeling/of dread for the man who prospers so, lest he fall" (Ls.296-7). She is, particularly, aware of their potential malevolence as she looks at the pathetic group of women, made captive by the victorious Heracles, and whom Lichas has brought to the homestead. Their fate could so easily be her own. She greets them with a feeling regard and is, especially, concerned by the appearance of one young girl. Her own inner happiness increases the strength of her pity -- "She should not have further grief/on my account to add to her present unhappiness". (Ls.330-01). The situation contains a subtle warning, it is full of a painful irony, for Lichas, out of his loving regard for her, mistakenly embroiders his account of Heracles' activities and conceals the fact that the girl is Iole, his master's current sexual obsession. Where his wife loves, Heracles lusts.

When the truth is revealed to her, she is shocked, but understanding of man's physical needs. It is at this moment of personal humiliation that she shows the strength of a character which has been developed through hardship, loneliness and the need for self-sufficiency. With charity and wisdom, she accepts the power of sexual attraction and does not condemn either man or woman -- "She has been guilty

of nothing shameful,/and she has done no harm to me." (Ls.447-8). She acknowledges Heracles' previous infidelities and has accepted them without rancour. She has nothing but pity for a girl whose beauty has proved to be her undoing, and, who will continue, unwittingly, to bring harm to others.

Deianeira has proved herself to be a woman whose resources are of an exceptional nature. We, the audience, are relieved. When she returns, however, the front which she has displayed before Lichas breaks down, and her self-control is overcome by emotion. When she speaks, as woman to woman, with her friends, she shows her pain and is, temporarily, bitter -- "This is the gift my brave/and faithful Heracles sends home to his dear wife/to compensate for his long absence!" (Ls.540-2). She appreciates that the beauty of youth has defeated her. She attempts rationalisation of the problem, but it is a rationality which has grown askew through shock. Desperate measures do not always resolve desperate situations and the unreasoned choice of the love-charm will destroy everything, most vilely.

Realisation of Nessus' revengeful duplicity and her responsibility as an agent, however innocent, of evil is a self-revelation of tragic power, arousing the Aristotelian emotions of pity and fear. --"I see myself as someone who has done a terrible thing". (L.706). Never, even with feelings of bitterest pain, would she have considered injuring, let alone destroying, the man to whom she is so devoted. She will kill herself, for --"I could not bear to live and hear myself called evil/when my only wish is to be truly good." (Ls.721-2). Hyllus, her son, with the cruelty of ignorance, disbelief and youth, accuses his mother

of his father's most horrible suffering, which can only lead to death. She listens, without a word, to the dreadful story, hears how the faithful Lichas, too, has been killed, and goes, quietly, with dignity, attempting no explanation, like the ghost she is soon to become. Alone, she bids farewell to her home, her servants, her memories, and, finally, on the marital bed, she dies by the sword, a hero's, not a woman's death.

The wretched Hyllus, now aware of the true facts, is forced to watch his father's agony and to listen to the curses heaped upon his mother who, by her action, has brought dishonour upon the great warrior -- "A woman, a female, in no way like a man,/she alone without even a sword has brought me down." (Ls.1062-3). When Hyllus is, eventually, allowed to speak, he tells his father the truth -- "It was a charm for love she wanted to put on you/that failed - when she saw that marriage in her house." (Ls.1138-9)

Her act of irrationality, born of desperation, was the direct result of her husband's lack of self-control. It is he who is responsible for the tragedy. The gods are pitiless. --"You see how little compassion the gods/have shown in all that's happened." (Ls.1266-7)

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(iii) Antigone

Although concerned with the concluding episodes of the Theban cycle, Sophocles' creation of "Antigone" represents his initial interest in this material, dealing with conflict which grows in violence through the uncontrolled exercise of pride, the need for power and an obsessive self-gratification; all actions which are punishable by the gods. The blackness of the theme is, however, relieved by

an underlying thread of hope, in the possibility of man's regeneration through love. Life in an environment in which charity is paramount, and peace an acknowledged presence, brings fulfilment to the individual in the security of contentment. This is, surely, preferable to the pain which one's self-involvement can inflict upon others, as well as upon oneself. Sophocles' interpretation of the autocratic ruler, Creon, may have been a subtle warning to his contemporary, Pericles, but its message is not specific to the time. It has a universal relevance; as the humanity of the play's content, and the spirituality of its form, ensure the lasting value of its influence.

Antigone and Ismene, having left their father at peace, at Colonus, return to a war-torn Thebes, where Eteocles is in charge. Polyneices, as he had already told them, is preparing to attack his brother, with the help of Argive troops. He hopes to defeat him and take the crown. Not exactly a propitious home-coming for the travel-worn Antigone, who was determined to prevent war, if it were possible. It wasn't. The brothers kill each other, the Argive attackers disperse to their own lands, and Creon takes control. This is just what he has been waiting for. Ever since his sister's alliance with Laius, his life has been filled with a continuing series of aggravations. He, now, seizes the opportunity to do what he considers to be right, to bring stability to a disturbed city through the introduction of a near-tyrannical form of government. Obviously, he has little love for the pathetic, but irritating, remnants of Oedipus' family.

The basic insecurity of his character, revealed by his adoption of such a form of civic rule, demanding



unquestioning obedience to himself, is further illustrated by a god-like inflexibility, which is destructive. He makes a decision which he must know insults belief but will not change. To refuse a man the rituals of death and the right of burial was an irreligious act, recognized as giving gross dishonour to the dead. It was as spiritually unacceptable as is abortion to the Catholic. Antigone is, equally, inflexible, in her determination to defy what she knows to be wrong and prepared to accept martyrdom for such defiance. The fact that his decree has been disregarded by a young female increases the irrationality of Creon's behaviour, and imprisons compassion fast within himself, until it is too late. He is not a villain, but an unimaginative man who becomes his own god; his fate is assured. He loses everything - wife, son and a promised new daughter, through a pride which gives him a feeling of security and belief in himself. Ismene is left. What can the relationship of these two be like after all that has happened? The gods' work of doom has brought no peace, except, ironically, to Oedipus, but only a continuation of personal suffering, for -- "It extends to all the kin/like the wave that comes when the winds of Thrace/run over the dark of the sea," (Ls.587-9)<sup>1</sup>.

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1. Sophocles. l. pp. 159-204. (Greene and Lattimore, 1954).

Antigone and Ismene, the sisters

"Nowhere else has the poetry of the ancient world embodied so lofty or so beautiful an ideal of woman's love and devotion."

(Jebb, R.C. (1888) p. xxxiv).

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In Aristotelian terms, Creon is the hero, who falls through his own fault, but it is Antigone who is the catalyst, and it was, evidently, Sophocles' intention, as the play is named after her, that she should be regarded as the dominant character : Jebb allots her role to the protagonist.

The Antigone of Colonus will be revealed as a controlled person, ruled by love for the one individual with whom she had been in close contact for so many years. Self-reliant, determined, resourceful and brave, she will display all the attributes which a fifth century protected female was supposed not to possess. The present Antigone is similarly unrepresentative of her sex, showing an independence of spirit, understandable, from the nature of her past, but alien to her present environment. She is defiant of social expectation and, particularly, of dogmatic, male authority, as practised by Creon. Her overt attempt to fulfil the traditional burial rites for Polyneices, denied to him by Creon, categorised her as a rebel, who deliberately flouts the law on the grounds of religious principle. She is alone, an isolation which is emphasised by a male chorus, but secure, in herself, in that her action was morally justifiable.

Family love, which has governed her life, and directed her relationship with her father, is transferred to her brother, to the point of willing self-sacrifice. The rights

of the kin are more important than those of any husband or child, for one's immediate relations are particular, irreplaceable and unique. Death is welcome for in death there will exist the joy of a family-reunion -- but, it is a fearful departure and she needs all her courage not to cry out for mercy. She finds her peace, at last, and with her on the journey, she has two unexpected companions, Haemon and Eurydice.

The forbearing, virginal Antigone, who for twenty-odd years has devoted herself to unselfish service for a disinterested love, is here the militant Antigone who, surrounded by physical and moral conflict, is prepared to lose her life in the performance of a duty which will ensure spiritual peace for her brother. Love is the over-riding motivation. It is interesting to note that Ismene, in accord with her far less complicated personality, will not change. She remains loyal and loving, always.

Selflessness, true charity, is the guiding principle of their lives, and, when one considers the background, this is a very remarkable thing. Sophocles reveals his awareness of, and concern with, this principle, so that the beauty and truth of these women are timelessly relevant.

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There is no choral presence for the prologue, and the two sisters present the current situation for the information of the audience while the dramatist begins to reveal the complexity of Antigone's character and the growing gulf of misunderstanding between the two women.

Zeus' power to punish continues to control their lives. Their brothers have died in futile conflict. Antigone is patently agitated for Creon, the new ruler, while allowing

burial for one brother, has refused it for the other. Anyone, meaning, specifically, either of the sisters, who attempts the necessary ritual, will be killed. Antigone wastes no time. She will perform the ritual, and Ismene is presented with an immediate moral problem -- "-- you soon will show/if you are noble, or fallen from your descent." (Ls.37-8)<sup>1</sup>. Single-minded in her own determination to do what she considers to be right, she woundingly taunts Ismene's natural caution. She does not appreciate that the latter's approach stems, not from fear, but from the rational realisation that such an action will but complete the family's destruction -- "We must remember that we two are women/so not to fight with men". (Ls.61-2). With the past intertwined with the present, she knows -- "that wild and futile action makes no sense." (L.68). Her words make no sense to an increasingly emotional Antigone, who would prefer that all should know what she intends to do. She is beyond reason. At such a time as this, when they should be standing together against Creon, using persuasion and not violence, she withdraws herself from Ismene, who, heart-sick, can see, so clearly, what will happen -- "Go, since you want to. But know this : you go/senseless indeed, but loved by those who love you."<sup>(Ls. 98-9)</sup> Antigone is alone, but resolute.

Creon, the self-appointed autocrat, is naturally incensed when he understands that his edict has been disobeyed - or, did he, perhaps, hope that the sisters would ignore his word and that, thus, he could finally dispose of the obnoxious family, once and for all? There is, however, something strange about the illicit action, which was performed unknown to the guards. Was it the gods? Compassionate, at last? This is an event which is never

1. Sophocles I. pp. 159-204 (Grune and Lattimore, 1954).

explained.

If it were Antigone, the seeker after martyrdom, why and how did she come and go unperceived? Why did she come a second time? The guard contends that she cursed the remover of the initial covering : could not this be an excuse, a cover-up for their carelessness? Was she not rather bewailing the sight of her brother's torn and stinking body? She admits to two coverings, but is this true? Does she, perhaps, suspect that the quietly-determined Ismene has forestalled her in order that she, Antigone, may be safe? Such a love, which she has rejected! The thought is unbearable and she has to be the guilty one. An unresolved mystery, this adds to the tension of the scene, which is retained at a peak by Creon's opportune return <sup>"Back from the house again just when he's needed". (L. 385)</sup> and a confrontation which provides an opportunity for a moral agon; the spiritual -- "-- the gods' unwritten and unfailing laws." (L.455) - as opposed to the civic. Antigone becomes the accuser, and Creon, guilty of creating his own rule of law through an acquired, and not a rightfully inherited, authority.

Secure in her spiritual belief, she has gone beyond fear into a state of glorified courage, filled with the joy of morality justified. Humiliated and reduced by the fact that a woman is having the better of him, Creon grows increaingly vindictive, and includes Ismene in his accusation. She has been acting suspiciously - one can imagine why - "-- I saw her in the house,/maddened, no longer mistress of herself." (Ls.491-2) - she, too, must have been involved. In his obsessive need to be in the right, Creon condemns himself. In his basic insecurity and fear, he loses all sense of pity and understanding. The fact that Antigone's love for, and

duty towards, her brother is stronger than her love of life, is incomprehensible to him. Ismene's love for Antigone would be equally incapable of understanding as he sees Antigone, determined to keep full responsibility, reject and insult her, while Ismene, struggling for control, pleads, alternately, with her sister for herself, with Creon for her sister -- "What life is there for me to live without her?" (L567). The prescience of Antigone's bitter -- "Love Creon. He's your kinsman and your care," (L.549) - shows Ismene what that life will be. Antigone has made the right choice and will go to join the kin. The intended cruelty of Antigone at this, the last encounter, can only be justified by the highly-charged emotional state of her situation. She has, resolutely, willed herself towards death, but now that the thought has become a near-reality, she is filled with the fear of the unknown.

In order to justify her action to herself, and to sustain her courage, in order to close her ears to words of loving tenderness which will destroy her self-control, she has to shout hurtful abuse at the one whose concern for her has been constant throughout all their past suffering. This is Ismene's tragedy. She never sees her sister again -- "No generation can free the next./One of the gods will strike. There is no escape." (LS.594-5) The original sin continues to affect them.

During the course of her exchange with Creon, the audience has been made aware of the existence of Haemon, his son, betrothed to Antigone. In his own way, Creon is as isolated as she is, but, whereas, she has a security founded on spirituality and love, he is unsure, of himself, of his tenure of office. Not an evil, but a proud and misguided

man, who tends to bluster and adopt ruthless measures in order to satisfy his self-esteem. Antigone has offended his self-image - and - she is a woman. He expects condemnation from Haemon and, pathetically relieved when this is not forthcoming, attempts justification for his action. -- "There is no greater wrong than disobedience." (L.672). To be beaten by a woman, and such a woman, is insupportable -- "I won't be called weaker than womankind." (L.680). It becomes apparent that Haemon's acceptance of his father's dictum is a deception. He loves Antigone and he does all that he can, with a calm reason, to encourage a change of heart, the humility of re-consideration. -- "--it can be no dishonour/to learn from others when they speak good sense." (Ls.722-3). Time is running out for Antigone. The audience shares in the urgency and pain. Haemon's control is remarkable. The initial subterfuge, encouraging trust, does not work. As soon as Creon realises the moral antagonism, the implied criticism, he rejects any further contact. Antigone's attitude to Ismene has been similarly blind and cruel. This emotionally powerful scene is full of Antigone's presence. The Chorus sing of love, and we are reminded, not only of its present tragic unfulfilment, but of her motivation, from the beginning. Love and moral duty in conflict with self-love and a self-evolved law. Love produces a force which will withstand Antigone's death.

Surrounded by men, emphasizing her isolation, she prepares to die, an ending pre-determined by the implacability of the gods. --"My own putting to sleep a god has planned like hers." (L.831), paying for her father's pain. We pity her situation as we applaud the strength of her courage --"Unwept, no wedding-song, unfriended, now I go/the road

laid down for me./No longer shall I see this holy light of the sun./No friend to bewail my fate." (Ls878-81). She is upheld by the thought of the reunion with the kin. She is morally justified, for the needs of the kin take precedence over all other emotional relationships, and the perceptive will realise that -- "--my choice was right." (L.904). One can find another husband, bear another child, but a brother, once lost, can never be replaced -- "--with my parents hid away in death,/no brother, ever, could spring up for me." (Ls.911-12) If she has erred, then "-- in suffering I'll see my error clear." (L.929). She does not curse the gods or her fate; she has no regrets. -- "Look, leaders of Thebes,/I am last of your royal line./Look what I suffer, at whose command,/because I respected the right." (Ls.940-3). She leaves. There is no word of remembrance for Ismene. At such a moment, one would have preferred compassion rather than rejection.

It would seem that the climax has been reached, and that the play is over. The gods have been satisfied. Sacrifice has been made on the altar of belief. The accuser is justified.

Sophocles has not finished with Creon's punishment, yet. The prophetic Teiresias, previously involved in the family's fate, warns him of the result of his actions, --"Stubbornness and stupidity are twins." (L.1028). He has perverted and inverted an accepted religious rite, by entombing the living but refusing burial to the dead. He has destroyed his present and his future peace. At first, pridefully stubborn, he is, eventually, forced to remember the seer's accuracy of vision and to take positive action -- "The gods move very fast/when they bring ruin on misguided men."



(Ls.1103-4). Somewhat late, and perhaps too late -- "I've come to fear it's best to hold the laws/of old tradition to the end of life." (Ls.1113-14). The audience is suspended in a condition of uncertainty, the choral song like a held breath. It is soon resolved. Creon has made his final and fatal error, in the evaluation of priorities. Instead of releasing Antigone first, he elects to satisfy his sick conscience by involvement in the belated rituals for Polyneices. The time-lag allows Antigone to hang herself and Haemon, in the presence of his tardy father, to die by the sword, unforgiving to the end -- "The boy looked at him with his angry eyes,/spat in his face and spoke no further word." (Ls.1231-2). Another climax has been reached. Surely this is the end for Creon - but, there is one more sacrifice to be made.

Eurydice, wife of Creon, an innocent victim of conflict, violence and hate, makes her poignant entry, and, after hearing the account of her son's death, the result of her husband's mismanagement, leaves in silence: a dramatic device which will be used to equal emotional effect by Deianeira. Eurydice speaks but seven lines and yet her anguish is conveyed, not only through the words of others but through the silence of her portentous deparure. She represents the pain of all bereaved mothers. By violence, she has been made to suffer, by violence, she dies. Creon's punishment is complete -- "Great words by men of pride/bring greater blows upon them./So wisdom comes to the old." (Ls.1350-2).

Antigone finds peace in death, in the expected reunion with her family and in the unexpected company of Haemon. Love has governed her life and motivated her end. In

rejecting charity, Creon loses everything - except, perhaps, Ismene, whose need to love and be loved is as great as that of her sister.

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(iv) Oedipus at Colonus

In terms of imaginative insight and spiritual power, this is a remarkable play, the creation of a very old man, who was living at a time of war, defeat and civic upheaval. Despite intrusive but dramatically necessary elements of pride, vindictiveness and conflict, and the sense of loss at Oedipus' supernatural departure, the dominant message is one of peace and love; of Oedipus, morally resurrected and at final peace with himself and with those whom he loves; Oedipus who will bring a protective peace and spiritual guardianship to the city of Athens, whose generosity has given him sanctuary. The message is fitting for an old man, making ready for his own final journey. It is, equally, fitting as a lesson to a state reduced by constant fighting and the loss of the democratic system. This was the glory of Athens - now - disfigured by war and hate.

The longest of all extant tragedies, it covers that period of the history of the house of Laius which comes between "Oedipus Tyrannus" and "Antigone", the last-named being the initial work of the three. As the time-span of creativity covers some thirty-five years, and it is probable that no manuscript play-copies were retained at that time, any factual inaccuracies are excusable on the grounds of age: but the consistency and logical development of the characterisations reveal a retention of interest and artistic involvement which were stronger than the effects of time and

are indicative of the influence which this tragic story had upon him.

After twenty years of a wandering and homeless exile, enforced by Creon, and made more bitter through his sons' self-seeking disloyalty, Oedipus arrives at Colonus, west of Athens, where there is a grove, sacred to the Eumenides. Apollo's oracle has decreed that this place will give him lasting rest. He is accompanied by his daughter, Antigone. His other daughter, Ismene, has been left at Thebes, as a physical link between the city of origin and her father. The two young women must be in their mid-to-late twenties, at least.

Creon has, also, received a message from the oracle, stipulating the need for Oedipus' return to Thebes, to ensure its safety. The risk of pollution, however, causes Creon to add his own proviso - that the return be dependent upon the exile's residing outside the city. This potential disruption of his hard-won peace is further exaggerated for Oedipus by the knowledge of his sons' fratricidal intentions. His daughters, he loves; his sons, full of pride and a lust for power, he curses.

Theseus, believing in the blind man's power to intercede for Athens, after death, helps him to resolve the pressing external difficulties. He is at peace, at last, but his girls are left to face a future of pain and conflict, in which one of them will be destroyed.

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#### Antigone, and her sister, Ismene

For nearly all her life, Antigone devoted herself to the loving care of her crippled outcast of a father, his constant companion and help. Her compassionate sense of filial duty

was, self-evidently, stronger than any repugnance which might have been felt due to his pollution, and its cause. John Ferguson<sup>1</sup> regards her as -- "-- one of the loveliest characters in Greek drama."

The particular nature of the characterisation gives the subtle impression of role-dominance. One tends to disregard the fact that Ismene was equally as loving, equally as loyal, equally as courageous as her sister, and that her life, too, had been one of dutiful service. Admittedly, the constant involvement with a homeless, awkward and self-involved parent, who became even more difficult with age, was no sinecure. To live in surroundings dominated by a past guilt, allied to a present filled with violent hostility between her brothers and an uncle's dislike, was no easy matter either. Devoted to each other, devotedly faithful to their father, they had chosen their respective roles with an unselfish disregard for themselves. They were two sides of the same coin; one emotional, the other, rational - but a coin which represents filial love at its best, sympathetic and selfless; enduring all things with a courageous patience; beautiful in its spiritual nobility.

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One afternoon, father and daughter arrive at, what will prove to be, their final destination. They are weary and Antigone, as is her custom, makes her father comfortable, for -- "It was a long road for an old man to travel." (L.20)<sup>2</sup>. She speaks with a gentle simplicity, revealing, in only a few lines, her personality and their relationship. She is his eyes, his guide, his support, reacting sensitively to his mood and to his needs. The stranger has given him unexpected information which disturbs him. Antigone calms

1. Ferguson, John (1972) p. 226.

2. Sophocles I. pp. 79-155 (Gruel and Lattimore 1961)

him -- "Now you may speak tranquilly, / For only I am with you." (Ls. 82-3) and there is tranquillity, itself, in the words. As he prays, she protects him with her vigilant care and warns him to be silent when a group of elderly men appears. They wish to know the identity of these people who have violated the sacred place. Their tone is kindly but peremptory and Antigone advises caution. She will be near him, at his side, guiding his steps -- "Lean your old body on my arm; / It is I who love you." (Ls. 200-01), carefully watching and listening. When the revelation that he is Oedipus becomes painfully inevitable, it is she, with the commonsense of affection, who sees that there is no other choice -- "Tell them; there is no other way." (L. 217). The elders, appalled, demand an immediate departure, and, once more, it is Antigone, the woman, who courageously, becomes the advocate of mercy and pity, reminding them of the gods' power over the fate of men -- "For you will never see in all the world / A man whom God has led / Escape his destiny!" (Ls. 251-3). Their good nature responds to the emotional urgency of her pleading. He is to stay and Theseus will determine the rest. How many times, during their long odyssey, had she similarly protected him from the curses of the shocked and unforgiving. When one considers the nature of the man and his past, when one considers that she is, apart from this cripple, alone, dependent only upon herself, she shows a brave determination to continue her self-appointed task which is quite extraordinary. She has denied herself the material advantages of her social position -- "-- she rejected the sweet life of home / so that her father should have sustenance." (Ls. 351-2). She has denied herself relationships with her peers; she has adopted

virginity as a part of her chosen role of loyal service. Yet, she is neither embittered nor frustrated, but sustained by the strength of her spirituality, and orientated towards the well-being of her family, which has the prior claim upon her life.

Suddenly, coming from the north, she sees - and makes us see, too - a figure "wearing the wide Thessalian sun-hat." (L.314), riding towards them, accompanied by a servant. She is filled with a joyful expectation, in which we join -- "It is no one else but she! And she is smiling/Now as she comes! It is my dear Ismene!" (Ls.320-1). The skill of the dramatist's characterisation is continually illustrated by the simple beauty of her utterances. Ismene, too, is immediately established in our receptive imaginations, for she expresses deeply-felt emotion with an equally sincere simplicity. She has found her dearest ones, how, she does not know, and is so moved by relief that -- "I don't know how I shall see you through my tears!" (L.326). Our eyes are full, also. We wait for Antigone to question the reason for the meeting, to demand news of her native city, but she remains silently listening, whilst her sister tells of the warring and faithless brothers, contending for power, to the exclusion of any possible return by their father, even though this has been advocated by the Delphic oracle. Creon's arrival is imminent. He wishes Oedipus to return home, but solely as a safeguard to the city, and showing no signs of a welcoming generosity. Oedipus is outraged. He remembers his sons' disloyalty from the beginning. He thinks of his daughters who love him -- "Only by grace of these two girls, unaided,/Have I got food or shelter or devotion;/The others held their father of less worth/than sitting on a throne and

being king." (Ls.446-9). Creon can bluster as much as he likes. Oedipus will remain with Athens.

Throughout the course of this dramatic revelation, Antigone remains silent, her emotional involvement creating a tension which communicates itself to the audience, who share the pain of the news of the brothers' violent behaviour, who share the anger at Creon's insulting suggestion. She does not speak until some definite action is required: to be active in the present is better than to brood upon the irresolvable. The elders have suggested placatory libations to the Eumenides. Ismene will perform the ritual. Antigone remains with her father, comforting him with her presence -- "--Antigone, you'll stay/And care for father./Even if it were hard,/I should not think it so, since it is for him." (Ls.508-9). Ismene and Antigone; in spite of everything which he has done, and is, they remain devoted to him.

Antigone stays, and is subjected to her father's story, once again. The elders' curiosity has to be satisfied. The longed-for peace has, certainly, to be paid for. With Theseus' eventual arrival, however, Oedipus' safety and his spiritual gift to Athens, haven of freedom and security, are ensured. The end of one part of her life-mission is in sight, but, until that end is reached, she will continue to watch over him.

She has cause, for Creon, in person, apparently sympathetic and understanding, arrives in persuasive mood. Oedipus rejects his advances, and curses his faithless sons -- "And what my sons will have of my old kingdom/Is just so much room as they need to die in!" (Ls.784-90). A terrible malediction from a man whose sufferings appear to have taught

him nothing, except the need for moral self-justification.

Where the deprivations of his women have taught them a charity which loves as it forgives, his experience has not diminished his pride, nor has it taught him to control his passions. He has an inner fire still burning within him, ready to burst into flame. Whereas, the sisters' unnatural life-style has brought them a peace which supports, encourages and soothes. Antigone needs all her courage as she listens to the old men's bitter quarrel; as she hears the awful nature of her father's curse upon her brothers. It is socially impossible for her to intervene. She needs even more courage when she understands that, in spiteful revenge, Creon has kidnapped her beloved Ismene, and that she, too, is about to be taken from her father. What can old men do to help her? --"Oh, God, where shall I run? What help is there/From gods or men?" (Ls.828-9). For the first time, she loses control. She is afraid, not for herself, but for her father. Without Athens' immediate help, what will become of him? He struggles to reach her, but she is held fast and forced away. Theseus' fortunate return, as the representative of the rule of law against that of violence, saves Oedipus from capture, but provides an opportunity for him to witness further bitter wrangling between Creon and Oedipus, in a scene of verbal conflict, which corrosively activates the ever-present memories. Theseus, and a reluctant Creon, go in search of the missing sisters.

The hiatus of waiting is filled by the imagination of the elders who picture the rescue by the superior forces of Athens, and who present Oedipus with the actuality of the prisoners' return. They have been saved.



With his intuitive artistic sensitivity, the scene of reunion is dramatically underemphasised by Sophocles. Basic in the simplicity of its language, the beauty of its tenderness is far more moving than an aria of emotionalism. Antigone is the spokeswoman, and it is she who directs the tone of the exchange with her father who, in following her lead, reacts feelingly to the renewed presence of love -- "I have what is dearest to me in the world./To die, now, would not be so terrible,/Since you are near me." (Ls.1110-12)

Sadly, his peace is of short duration. He is afraid of polluting his friend, protector of the weak. However, his attitude seems to indicate a continuing self-involvement which influences his attitude towards his son, Polyneices who, he is now given to understand, wishes to speak with him. His attitude is hard, unrelenting, cruel. The son proves to be the reflection of his father.

Again, Antigone has been the listener, and this time, despite her father's antagonism, she has the strength of will to intercede for her brother, whom she loves and whom she would save, if it were possible. She begs her father to show wisdom and rationality, to practice the concept of justice by reason and not be violence -- "--you could not/Rightfully wrong him in return!" (Ls.1190-1), for -- "If you do,/I'll think you'll see how terrible an end/terrible wrath may have." (Ls.1197-8). Look at your own fate. Listen to me -- "And you, to whom I have not yet been hard,/Should not be obdurate with me!" (Ls.1202-3). Her bold words are considered and permission unexpectedly given. He will see his son. The sisters await their

brother. They see him --"--his eyes/Swollen with weeping as he comes." (Ls.1250-1). There is going to be no joyous reunion, here, but only added difficulty, another emotional disturbance, more of the familiar conflict and harassment. With sisterly love and the wisdom of an understanding sympathy, Antigone advises her brother to speak frankly to his father. In vain for Oedipus cannot forget past rejection, and his present state which is the bitter result. It is daughters, not his sons, who have saved him -- "-- they are my support,/And are not girls, but men, in faithfulness." (Ls.1367-8). He disowns the sons and curses them, foretelling their total destruction with a terrifying clarity; coldly, objectively, without pity. However devious Polyneices' intentions may have been, he knows that this is the end and begs his shocked sisters that he may not be dishonoured in his death -- "But give me a grave and what will quiet me." (L.1410). Desperately, Antigone attempts to dissuade him from his ambition, trying rational argument and emotional plea. He is adamant, armoured by the family pride, deaf to commonsense and the desperate words of his sister's love -- "You go with open eyes to death!" (L.1440). Without him, she is lost. Polyneices' fate rests with the gods, but in leaving his sister, he prays that -- " -- no evil comes to you,/For all men know you merit no more pain." (L.1445-6). A prescient conclusion of dramatic impact to a knowledgeable fifth century audience.

The pain of loss, and the certitude of the brothers' savage end, are fresh in their minds, when a violent storm presages an even greater loss; Zeus is calling for Oedipus. Antigone tries to help him, but he needs only Theseus, now, and, with the power of an inner vision, his blindness

forgotten, he leads them towards his place of departure, to be known to Theseus, alone.

The final kommos, a threnody of loss, loneliness and despair is the outpouring of an emotion which has been controlled for so long; the purpose of their existence has been taken from them. They are desolate and fearful -- "O father! O my dear!/Now you are shrouded in eternal darkness,/Even in that absence/You shall not lack our love,/Mine and my sister's love." (Ls.1700-3). It is their love for him which has sustained them both for so long. Antigone wishes to go to his resting-place, but Ismene, with a rationality which she will attempt to use to greater effect, later, dissuades her. Although they can remain safely in Athens, they know that they have to go home, in an attempt to -- " -- stop the bloody war/From coming between our brothers!" (Ls.1771-2). To the end, selfless love directs their actions, dominating their lives.

Oedipus, whose life has been ruled by self-interest and discoloured by hate, finds peace at last. His daughters, whose lives have been governed by an unselfish devotion to their kin, and especially their father, are to be subjected to conflict, with all its pain and suffering. This is their tragedy.

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b) Hate is the governing force

Electra

"--the tragedy is the grimmest of all Greek tragedies."

E. (Kitto, H.D.F. (1939), p. 134).

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This difficult play, regarded in some areas as a masterpiece,

is concerned with the morality of a justified vengeance for murder of the kin, an act, which in its contemporary context, increased the compulsion towards revenge. David Grene<sup>7</sup> states that academic opinion considers Sophocles' account as nearest to that of its Homeric source. Despite the continued success of "The Oresteia", and the standard which it had set, demanding care in any new interpretation, this play was of a long-lasting popularity, principally because of the interest aroused by the Electra, instrument for violent punishment, who was motivated rather by her own feelings than by the gods' will.

The dramatist's interpretation contains no apparent judgmental bias, but is logical and uncomplicated in its examination of the effect of inter-linking relationships. It is an objective study of the recognizable within an environment of inevitability, expressed with dramatic power and emotional force. Under such circumstances, therefore, the audience is responsible for making its own subjective evaluation, dependent upon individual belief and attitude, associated with both time and locality. Thus, it becomes possible for Electra to be regarded as a noble or an ignoble heroine. R.C.Jebb<sup>1</sup>, for example, sees the character as sympathetic and expressive of an heroic constancy. From the text, it is possible to visualise Electra like this - if one forgets those other examples of truly devoted love, Tecmessa, Deianeira, Antigone, Ismene. It is felt that the complexity of this woman denies the acceptance of the overly simplistic and favourable view of her. Equally simplistically, it would be possible to classify her as the villainess in a melodrama, if it were not for the carefully detailed characterisation, observed with such humanity and

1. Jebb, R.C. (1894).

understanding.

This is a black play, full of hate, despair, cruelty and violence, governed by the irrational, redolent of evil. Its principal character is disturbed to the point of mental unbalance, a crippled being. It is difficult to find pity for the pitiless, and only clinical pity for the obsessed, for an undiluted unreason tends to lose sympathy. There is involvement in the horrible predicament of an injured human-being, a product of hate and emotional conflict, but the involvement becomes related more to subjective pity and fear for oneself. Electra is an objective example of that which could happen.

Brian Vickers<sup>1</sup> theorises that the Sophocles' version is a refutation of that of Euripides, whose Electra is a psychological study of emotional deprivation, and a defence of Aeschylus' portrait in "The Oresteia" which, based upon belief in the gods' power places the responsibility for action upon them. However, Sophocles, while acknowledging the Apollo directive, places more emphasis upon the human than the god's role. The motivation for action comes from Electra's obsessive need for revenge : it is her moral choice. Vickers' theory as to the Euripidean influence upon the inner form of Sophocles' work assumes that production of his play took temporal precedence. If this were, in fact, the case it is more interesting to speculate how far Sophocles', presumably disapproving experience of Euripides' interpretation, unconsciously directed his own. His depth-study of the deliberate adoption of evil, by a woman whose estrangement from reality becomes increasingly marked, is self-evidently, psychologically based.

Public exploration of a diseased mind, and the

1. Vickers, Brian (1973).

invariably, unpleasant, yet at the same time, excitingly interesting incidents which result from it, make very good theatre and will ensure a play's popularity for as long as there is an audience willing to share in the experience. The theme is not specific but universal; the characters, recognizable; the consequences foreseen, but no less dramatic for that. The totality of effect which is particular to both individual and mass.

However, a theatrical experience was not the prime function of the religious festivals. Euripides' particularity of theme-interpretation, which included his depth-exploration of the personality, led to unfavourable reception of his work and to his unpopularity as an artist. It is unlikely, therefore, that the fifth century audience, with whom Sophocles was an especial favourite, would be consciously aware, to the exclusion of all other aspects, of the scientific element which is so evident to the modern mind, accustomed to this form of presentation. One can only speculate as to the manner of the play's reception and the reason for its popularity, remembering that the drama's purpose was spiritual and didactic.

No certain date of production is known. It is thought to have been performed during the period 430-14, a period which included the onset of the Peloponnesian War, the Athenian plague, the massacre of the innocent at Plataea and Melos and, finally, the diminishing power of the democratic ideal. The contemporary purport of the message and the nature of its reception can only be imagined and involve a subjective choice of antithetical imaginative interpretations.

If the presentation concerned a noble heroine, who was

dedicated to a faithful love for the murdered father and whose act of violent revenge was regarded both by gods and men as morally justified, then perhaps this exceptional woman of courage and constancy was a metaphor for Athens, pursuing a just course against an aggressive and traditional enemy.. The nobility and resourcefulness of Electra-Athens could then be considered as a form of propaganda for the continuation of the war and for the morality of its cause. But the concept of retributive justice had become alien to the social mores, and a fifth century Athenian would consider such action to be the work of a barbarian, and Electra as an ignoble heroine. In this role, she represents all Athenian women and their involvement with the war. For contact with aggression, suffering and deprivation breed hatred for the aggressor and the possibility of permanent damage to the personality. The obsessive bitterness of Electra-women could, thus, be considered as a form of propaganda for peace; for war not only maims physically, which is bad enough, but psychologically, which is worse, and Electra is, certainly, sick.

With artistic and technical mastery, Sophocles has created a powerful play, with a central character of such complexity that evaluation of his purpose is necessarily subjective. This adds to, rather than detracts from, its dramatic value, and has ensured its lasting applicability as universal communication.

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"The 'Electra' is perhaps the best-constructed and most unpleasant play that Sophocles wrote." (Greene, David (1957), p. 124)

Electra is one of the children of the king, Agamemnon of Mycenae, murdered by his wife, Clytemnestra. In this version, the killing was jointly planned and performed by Clytemnestra and her lover, Aegisthus. The safety of the young Orestes, which to Aeschylus was the mother's concern, is here shown to be the responsibility of his sister, Electra, who removes him from his mother to a place of protection outwith the kingdom. As the sole remaining male member of the original family, he will have the task of avenging his father's death. In accordance with recognized custom, and with the gods' goodwill, he is to be the weapon of retributive justice. Electra's natural feeling for her brother is outweighed by her obsession that vengeance shall be exacted and that Orestes is to be the obvious medium. To her, he is being reared for this one purpose.

Never allowed to experience an everyday life, with normal aims and ambitions, he is indoctrinated by his sister's singleness of purpose. He is tainted by her sickness. His mother, aware of the potential danger which he represents, and having abandoned any maternal sentiment which she may once have had, would be happy to see him dead. He lives on the edge of insecurity and violence, attached by a twisted thread of dependency to a sister who has led him from infancy. Here are two lost beings, struggling for warmth of contact and comfort in each other's company. All she can offer him is an unbalanced incentive to violence; all that he can offer her is his loyal acquiescence. They are bound together by the power of the evil which Electra has adopted as her chosen course, and by the terms of their own morality. If they fail, there is no future. If they



succeed, the solace will be of only temporary duration. Matricide will make them outcasts of society and the Fates, in their turn, will be avenged.

One must assume that, at one time, there was a recognizable social relationship between the girl and her mother, and that, in accordance with normative behaviour, they were attached to each other. The irrationality of Electra's subsequent attitude leads one to suspect that her directing force was emotionally-based, and that her reactive behaviour would tend towards the extremes of love and hate. When the mother took a lover during her father's absence, not only was Electra replaced in her affections, but Clytemnestra, obviously, became wary and resentful of the curiosity and growing hurt in the child's eyes. The mother rejected the child and the child's love turned to bitterness. The absent father became the object of adoration, and when he returned, only to be slaughtered, the bitterness grew rapidly to hatred and an obsessive need to justify herself through the violence of revenge. There is no pity for her mother, no compassion for the brother whom she will involve in the vile deed. Her failure to control the frequency of irrational outbursts against Aegisthus and her mother results in punitive measures being taken against her, which, under the circumstances, are understandable, but which to her are degrading and add to the bitterness. She is a complex composite, the product of unfavourable influences stemming from her environment and the people within it, whose actions highlight her own. She is a reflection of the mistrust, deceit and lies which surround her, and her responsive behaviour is a defence against such an atmosphere. Her tragedy is that such a defence only serves to increase

the power of the evil within which she is enmeshed. Her present is built upon her past and her future will be formed by the present: a future based upon such a pattern of morality is doomed.

The withdrawal of love, the trauma of emotional shock, the isolation, the bitterness of a wasted life, in an environment of conflict, doubt and fear, which prohibits the practice of normal relationships, have caused such damage that the personality has grown distorted and the emotions, out of control. She is pitiless, to herself and to those around her. She is a tragic figure who has been grossly misused.

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Unknown to anyone, Orestes returns home, accompanied by Pylades and a servant, his constant companion since his childhood, who has kept alive for him the idea of ultimate vengeance. This incitement has been reinforced by the Delphic oracle. In order to encourage confidence, in his victims, they are to be told of his death. Cruelly, Electra is included in this subterfuge, and the beginnings of her renewed relationship with the longed-for brother will be clouded by lies and unfeeling deceit. As they disappear to make an offering at Agamemnon's tomb, Electra arrives, in what appears to be a customary state of exaggerated lamentation, and calling for Orestes whom she imagines to be far away. The Mycenaean women, full of commonsense, but realising that her condition is her own fault -- "To destruction self-inflicted/you fall so shamefully." (Ls.216-7)<sup>1</sup>, offer a sympathetic, but rational ear to the continued theme of self-pity and bitterness -- " -- and never shall I give over my sorrow,/and the number of my dirges none

1. Sophocles *II*. pp 124-187 (Grun and Lattimore 1964)

shall tell." (Ls.231-2). Their realistic attitude emphasises her irrationality in presuming to take Zeus' role for her own. Their maternal consideration for her well-being emphasises her need for disinterested affection and guidance. Her own mother, whose sexuality disgusts her, has -- "now become/all hatred." (Ls.261-2). Her desire for Orestes is perversely unnatural for her determination to lead him towards violence is stronger than that of sisterly love. Circumstances have led to the choice of direction -- "Evil is all around me, evil/is what I am compelled to practise." (Ls.308-9). She knows what she is doing and yet her obsession impels her to continue.

Her relationship with her sister, Chrysothemis, is equally perverse and cruel. One is reminded of Antigone and Ismene, but, where Antigone's attitude was due to the presumed disloyalty of a beloved friend, Electra shows little regard for her sister, other than contempt. She is incapable of making normal contacts with her family. Like the women of the chorus, Chrysothemis is realistic and sensible. She tries to advise and help her sister. She is prepared to obey her, especially if a softer attitude towards herself is evident. She attempts a reconciliation, and unity in a bad situation, the existence of which she is ready to acknowledge -- " -- It is not reasonable for us two/to squabble about what is just." (Ls.467-8), - but in which she is not prepared to be actively involved.

Electra's interpretation of morality reinforces her isolation. An encounter with her mother is full of the conflict of opposing belief, made worse by the antagonism between them. Electra is a constant reminder to her mother of the past. Clytemnestra is a constant reminder of

loneliness and deprivation for her daughter, who screams out her pain in words of a violent and unnatural hatred, inspiring a similar defensive reaction in the mother. Electra realises her sickness, which she lays at her mother's door. The mutuality of their antipathy disallows any form of rational communication. -- "The hate you feel for me and what you do/compel me against my will to act as I do./For ugly deeds are taught by ugly deeds." (Ls.619-21). To blame another as a means of self-justification is a denial of truth; pride prevents self-evaluation.

The unbridled aggravation of her mother's presence creates a tension, which is now to be re-charged by the news of Orestes' supposed death. She is quite distraught. The long account of the accident is vividly real and adds to the shock. Without Orestes, there is no hope of revenge, and while Clytemnestra's life is relieved of fear -- "-- with this one day I am freed from fear/of her and him." (Ls.783-4). Electra is rendered powerless and her continued existence, pointless -- "Death is a favour to me, life an agony./I have no wish for life." (Ls.821-2). The anguish is not because of Orestes' loss, as a brother, but as medium of revenge. Her response to the news is as unnatural as are all her other actions and shows her growing separation from reality.

Chrysothemis, loving and caring despite her sister's antipathetic response, is insulted and rejected when she insists that Orestes is alive. Electra has been so poisoned by the miasma of deception that she does not wish to recognize the existence of truth, and Chrysothemis' spontaneous joy in giving pleasure, a natural action, is received with Electra's bitter and unnatural antipathy. She

does not choose love, but she is prepared to accept this gift from another, in the pursuit of her own ends. There is no Orestes, so her sister can become the substitute -- the innocent sacrifice. -- It says a great deal for Chrysothemis' affection that she can endure this hurtful nonsense, and that she can attempt to introduce a more rational approach to her sister -- "I beg of you, before you utterly destroy us and exterminate our family, /check your temper." (Ls.1009-11). She expects violent repercussions, but, persists in her persuasive efforts. Electra has gone too far along the road to evil, to listen to such advice.

At this moment, however, the women's previous plea for reason changes to one of active encouragement. These are free-born women, and, perhaps, have a notion of political power through the agency of a possible, but logically unlikely, victorious Electra. They now see, or make a pretence of seeing, her as Zeus' tool of punishment -- "Was there ever one so noble/born of a noble house?" (Ls.1080-1) - has the ring of sycophantic falsity, but is sufficient to bolster Electra's self-esteem. It would seem that, unconsciously, by the power of her amorality, she encourages from others, lies, deceit and psychological manipulation.

The most cruel lie of all is now brought to her. "--a tiny weight enclosed in tiny vessel." (L.1143) : Orestes' ashes have come home. Memories of the young brother, in comparison with all that remains of him, produces a temporary restoration - of a loving and beautiful Electra. She mourns simply, sincerely and with emotional effect. Even reference to the mother is spoken more with regret than the usual recriminatory hatred : this is the lost Electra, fractionally visible. As he realises her identity, Orestes,

too, mourns the loss of one who has grown unrecognizable. He still does not tell her who he is, but watches the transformation of the soft and sorrowing Electra into the embittered avenger. The re-arming with the carapace of hate is a necessary self-protection.

With the stranger as ready audience, she relives, once again, her mode of life - and its cause - strengthening her purpose with constant reminder. The pain of loss is intermingled with her predominant obsession, so that when Orestes does, eventually, reveal himself, their joy is founded upon the joint purpose - to kill. It is during this scene, tense with a mad emotion, that Electra betrays herself: the genuine feeling buried beneath the weight of pain -- "Child of the body that I loved the best". (L.1232) -- The love which she had for her mother; the irreparable damage which the mother's withdrawal of love has caused.

They prepare for action, regarding themselves as activated by the gods. Orestes assumes command, but Electra remains the catalyst. She is confident of success now that she is no longer alone. The gods will bless their deed of retribution, a deed which is morally right and just. It is the mother, the rejector, the rejected who must die first. The compulsion to see her dead, and violently dead, is so great that she entirely forgets the traditional punishment of the Erinyes, with which Orestes will be inflicted, for matricide. -- "Is the wretch dead?" (L.1425) is all that she can say for her lost love. With a mad joy, she incites a shocked Orestes towards the enactment of the second murder. She plays upon Aegisthus, with a dramatic irony which she shares with the audience. There is suspense as Clytemnestra's shrouded corpse is revealed and he realises

that Electra, his greatest enemy, has defeated him. Her parting words show that this terrible success has further unbalanced her mind, for she will find release and freedom from obsession if he is denied burial -- "--And killing/throw him out to find such burial as suit him,/out of our sights. This is the only thing/that can bring me redemption from/all my past sufferings." (Ls.1486-90). A pitiless hatred with which she continues to inspire a weakening Orestes.

They are joined in a double killing, arrogating to themselves a godlike role of retributive justice. There can be no happiness. The present will always discolour their future. Hate destroys both the hated and the one who hates. As her mother's child, Electra had no real chance. She was doomed from the beginning.

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### Chapter 3 - Euripides

#### A Women and War

"The unjust position of helpless women in a world organized by men has been shown as inevitable when men's lives and thoughts are dominated by war." (Vellacott, Philip (1972), p. 41).

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Any war affects the lives of those involved in it. To some, it is an economic advantage, to others, an opportunity to serve their fellows. The armed forces know that their fate is bounded by the diminishing circumference of chance. Civilians learn that danger and hardship, fear and death are not restricted to the battlefield.

The Peloponnesian War lasted for twenty-seven years, between two enemies whose aggressive intentions had been made apparent for some time prior to the actual commencement of hostilities. No doubt, it revealed many unrecorded instances of courage and self-sacrifice, but it, also, exhibited occurrences of pitiless cruelty, and treachery. Massacre of the besieged by Sparta; massacre of the recalcitrant by Athens were acts of an equally brutal inhumanity, which resulted in homelessness and starvation, in slavery for the survivors. These refugees, from unnecessary and uncontrolled violence, were women and children. They had lost men, homes, their reason for living. Their expectation of sympathy and kindness was small, if not, non-existent. Their future was bounded by the certainty of servitude instead of freedom, subjugation instead of independence. They were not foreigners, not barbarians, accustomed, as war-booty, to such a fate, but Greeks, whose only fault was that they had become inadvertently and unwillingly, involved in a conflict



instituted by men. If they lost their femininity with their hope, it is understandable. If they became changed out of all recognition, that is understandable, too. In such extreme circumstances, suffering and sorrow may, not always, but may, turn to a hatred demanding revenge and the violent self-justifying action. It may, also, lead to a passive acquiescence in an impossible and unbelievable situation, and its acceptance without any attempt at self-defence.

War not only brings physical and material destruction, but, through deprivation, disease, a lowering of social and moral standards, it injures the innocent non-combatant, who, unhappily falls within its sphere of influence -- the elderly, the women, the children -- those whom society is contracted to protect.

Weakened by plague and lack of food, economically overwhelmed by an influx of refugees, sickened and saddened by a war which went on and on, the fifth century Athenian, irrespective of rank or class, must have gone beyond any feeling of civic pride, towards the insecurity of possible defeat, towards fear of the future and despair for a conflict generated by greed and a determination to alter the centre of power. The tendency to sentimentalize isolated acts of heroism, in order to boost patriotism, diminishes the role of the majority, and its forced and obedient involvement in pain and suffering. Victor and victim are mutually degraded, and subject to spiritual deterioration. The Spartans expressed their unfeeling bestiality at Plataea; the Athenians, at Melos.

It would be very strange, indeed, if the dramatists who were working throughout this period, should not have felt impelled to use their art-form to communicate their views on

such a vital subject. As overt propaganda, subtle suggestion, or even criticism, they were able to reach and influence a large number of people. Euripides, individualist and realist, obviously had daily evidence of war's actuality. He does not appear to have adopted the superficially patriotic role, but, as any true lover will, was prepared to criticize the attitudes and actions of his city. A non-conformist to the popular viewpoint will, at best, be labelled unfavourably, and, at worst, find himself rejected by his fellows. It requires moral courage to express opinion contrary to public expectation, and an underlying spiritual strength to uphold that opinion. Euripides was a true patriot who was not averse to questioning the morality of his city's actions. All the extant plays were created under the shadow of impending war, or during the actuality of conflict, and illustrate the growing opposition, of a man past middle-age. Labelled as a pacifist, he became increasingly unpopular with his contemporaries. Later generations have come to appreciate the universal relevance of his anti-war stance, enhanced by the sensitivity of his humane approach.

As this war proved to be such an important influence upon his work, an importance related to the length of its duration, the plays under review are being examined in order of their creation, rather than of the chronology of the story-line. Thus, it is hoped, it will be possible to see the changing effect of conflict upon an artist of spirituality, truth and beauty.

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(a) Slavery -- woman manipulated by manAndromache

The ambiguity and irony of this play are such that it is difficult to know how it was intended to be interpreted. It could be an illustration of how women, affected by war, contrive to create their own, personal battles. It could show how women can become victims of circumstances engineered by men and in an atmosphere of duplicity, manipulated to male advantage. It could represent a study of the two faces of slavery -- the concrete or actuality of the enslaved and the abstract or actuality of the free. All these possibilities relate to the role of women in society and are presented with insight and observational accuracy. On the other hand, it could be an example of the immorality of greed for power, involving treachery and deception. Finally, it could be a straightforward piece of anti-Spartan propaganda. The last supposition is considered to be the most unlikely, as Euripides was far too subtle an artist to be so patently obvious. It is more likely that the insertion of the Spartan characters was a sop to Cerberus, and that what Euripides was saying was -- "Well, this is how you expect Spartans to behave, but I might just as well have made them Athenians."

On balance, it would seem that the dramatist's intention and interest lay with his female characters, although one, the title-role, disappears after line 765, and the other, Hermione, after line 1008. Despite Andromache's comparatively early departure, she influences the direction of Hermione's fate. The two women are inter-linked and their respective lives interweave to make a logical dramatic whole. In this respect, academic criticism on the grounds

that the play is divided into independent halves and is, therefore, artistically imperfect, show, rather, a malcomprehension of the artist's presumed intention -- namely, the examination of woman's response to an environment controlled by men, and within the overall context of a post-war situation.

It would be assumed that such a theme would call for a tragic interpretation. Euripides' unique vision has drawn a realistic picture of psychological manoeuvre and reaction, coloured by the irony of an acute observer of human nature. Of course, slavery is to be condemned, but the characterisation of this slave is such that one does not feel a pity comparable to that which one feels for Hecuba and her associates. Andromache is strong and independent and brave and speaks her mind. Her relationship with Hermione is typical of an antagonism between disparate females, which is expressed most vividly in speech, both cruel and funny. One could almost, classify the play as a black comedy. The men deceive each other for personal gain and satisfaction, using the women as pawns in their game of power.

In threatening to kill Andromache and the child, Menelaus pretends to be even more unpleasant than he actually is, by contriving that his daughter will be involved in a plot, which will irritate Peleus to such an extent that he will demand her removal from his house. This is what Menelaus wants. He sees no future in an alliance with Phthia, but considerable advantage in one with his nephew, Orestes of Argos, who, in conveniently disposing of Neoptolemus, Hermione's husband, is free to marry her. Peleus imagines that he has everything under control, and is further misled by the delectable Thetis.

When Andromache is admirable, it is Hermione, fearful and indecisive, an object of economic bargaining, who is to be pitied. She, too, is a slave, in thrall to her unfortunate past, governed by the machinations of present political, economic and military necessity, imprisoned by the prospect of a questionable future. One can see no happiness in store for Hermione, whereas, as one learns from Thetis, Andromache will find a future of well-being and peace. Throughout their brief relationship, it is Andromache, the slave, whom Euripides presents as in control, and Hermione, the free-woman, as a tool of others. Andromache - woman, slave, barbarian, shows wisdom and rationality, which are absent from the behaviour of the wretched Hermione, a Greek. Andromache wins a moral victory over her Greek rival.

This reversal of expectation in the allotted social role cannot have improved Euripides' relations with his contemporary audience. The ingenious, imaginative and original treatment of the theme provides the modern counterpart with a play of intellectual stimulation and emotional involvement, a pleasurable and instructive dramatic experience, in which irony is used to pinpoint truth, and wit to highlight human weakness -- "In antiquity it was criticized as a conglomeration of comic ingredients. And yet for the theatergoer there must have been not one dull or undramatic scene in this 'hard and brilliant' play."

(Nims, John F. (1958), p. 73 ).

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Andromache, widow of Hector, prince of Troy, killed in battle by Achilles, is, with a cruel irony, allotted to Neoptolemus, son of the man who slew her husband. She is

taken as a slave to Phthia, and forced to co-habit with her master, to whom she bears a son. Her hopes rest on this pathetic child. Unfortunately, Neoptolemus has a legal wife, Hermione of Sparta, who proves to be barren. For this she blames Andromache's assumed witchcraft, and seeks revenge, abetted by her father, Menelaus. Andromache, fearing for the life of her son has sent him into hiding, and has put herself, physically, under the protection of Thetis, the resident-goddess. She is alone, without possible assistance, for Neoptolemus is absent at Delphi. Peleus, her master's grandfather is old and unaware of her plight. Hermione has eyes everywhere, but Andromache, although distraught by the thought of the child's danger, and reminded of the murder of Hector's son, shows her philosophical courage. The course of life is so uncertain and there is no security of role or surroundings -- "It's vain to say that any man alive/Is in the true sense happy. Wait and ponder/the manner of his exit from this stage." (Ls.100-2)<sup>16</sup>.

The play has barely started but, already, we are aware, not only of the destruction of this woman's past and of her present enslavement, both occasioned by the actions of an oversexed and faithless Greek woman, but of the kind of being whom Euripides has created. She may be -- "-- a suppliant clutching,/Melting away, all tears, like water welling on rock." (Ls.115-6) - but this is no broken lily, this is a proud woman who has suffered the pain of loss, has been degraded and continually humiliated and has yet retained an inner strength which sustains her natural independence, her resourcefulness and her quick-wittedness. She is to be admired and respected, and only pitied as the representative

1. Euripides III. pp. 75-119. (Greene and Lattimore, 1958).

symbol of all women enslaved by war. This interpretation is reinforced by the humane sympathy and advice given to her by the free Phthian women, indicative of the influence of her personality upon others. The Chorus' role is one of rational interjection and objective comment, a form of verbal protection for the unprotected.

~~Andromache~~ ~~the~~ ~~only~~ ~~surviving~~ ~~play~~ ~~in~~ ~~which~~ ~~the~~ ~~agon~~ ~~is~~ ~~between~~ ~~women~~ Hermione, petulantly pretentious in her sad insecurity, causes an immediate atmosphere of aggravation to Andromache with insult and accusation. -- "There's a touch of jealousy in the female psyche./It's inclined to be rather tart where polygamy enters." (Ls.179-80) - is a witty truism from an observant Chorus. Andromache is no subservient underling, however, but a proud princess, far more experienced, in all respects, and far more sophisticated than the poor, jealous little girl with her unfortunate background. Her replies are to the point, and cruelly truthful. She is not averse to the sly dig --"Your mother/Helen was fond of her man - now wasn't she dear?/Don't try to outdo her. Sensible children/Really ought to avoid the family vices." (Ls.228-31). She may be afraid of the power attached to Hermione's social role, but she has no fear of her tongue. The slave has the mastery of this verbal duel; Hermione is, emotionally, enslaved by her frustration and jealousy. The women's behaviour in such a situation of conflicting personalities is so truthfully observed and the characterisations so realistic that the scene has an instant familiarity and timelessness. As in all such fracas, the loser, finally, ripostes with threats. The victor, now wondering whether things have gone too far, begins to fear the consequences of her moral success. The

arrival of the smugly self-satisfied Menelaus justifies her doubts as to her safety.

"--snorting so importantly, up in arms/Against a woman already down, in bondage." (Ls.328-9), this schemer presents her with an emotional dilemma upon a trumped-up charge. He has her son. It is his life or hers. If she refuses to leave the sanctuary of the holy-place, the child will die; if she leaves, she will die. The choice is simple and cruel, typical of the immorality and lack of compassion induced through war's influence. Her decision is not difficult, for mother-love is the ruling emotion. Nonetheless, Andromache, fearless despite physical superiority, bombards Menelaus with personal insult and logical argument and the mockery of irony -- mocking male assumptions as to the female role -- "And just because we women are prone to evil,/What's to be gained perverting man to match?" (Ls.353-4). She does not whine for pity, a superficial noise of complaint, but sorrows from the roots of her being; the continuing pain has no end except in death -- "O child, the one that bore you moves towards death/And all for you." (Ls.413-4).

She is brave and clever, his intellect and courage are inferior to hers, but, he has a cunning, an amorality which delights in dishonesty and psychological manoeuvre. She is not prepared for such blatant dissimulation and finds that she has been deceived, for, while she is made captive, the child's fate rests with Hermione. There is no charity to be expected from that quarter. -- "His prospects, it appears, are none too rosy." (L.444). Still, she doesn't give up and attempts to rout Menelaus in a highly-charged condemnation of Sparta -- perhaps, included by Euripides in response to the



news of the Plataean massacre, or, equally possible, as a comment upon all war-atrocities.

Andromache and the boy are to die. With an economy of words, simply, movingly, protected by the beauty of their love, they sing their despair -- "You'll be snuggled, my little lad,/Forever close to your mother's breast,/Dust with dust in the underworld" (Ls.510-12). This is the second time that she has seen a child lost in violent death, and she so far forgets her pride as to plead, not for herself, but for the boy's reprieve. Menelaus refuses, of course. Peleus arrives in time to prevent any further action. As a suppliant, Andromache hastens to explain a situation caused by Hermione's ill-feeling, and begs for help. The old man, in a dither of rage, drags up the old Helen-story, scapegoat for the war, and insists upon Hermione's immediate return to her father's house. Menelaus coolly counters all the insults, for he has won. This is just what he has schemed for. Andromache leaves with her son, but her influence remains, for she is the cause of Hermione's present predicament and her irrationality.

Alone, for her father appears to have left without her, distraught, full of guilt, frightened of Neoptolemus' reaction when he hears of her scheme to murder Andromache and his son, she has attempted suicide. No longer the braggart, but a pathetic and rejected girl, surrounded by deception. Loveless, uncertain, an economic object rather than a person, she is a slave to her father's greedy ambition for power. She is pitiful and to be pitied. In such an emotional state, receptive of manipulation from a stronger personality, she falls unsuspectingly and with ready agreement, under Orestes' spell. His arrival, planned to coincide with

Menelaus' departure, induces a suppliant-Hermione to become psychologically dependent upon him : here is somebody who will solve everything for her. --"It's partly my fault. Partly too my husband's/Partly some god's. But chaos everywhere." (Ls.902-3).

Cleverly, she is manoeuvred by an uncaring father and a cold-blooded cousin to beg for release from her present role, and an unwelcoming and friendless environment, in which gossiping idle female tittle-tattle *has* helped to destroy her marital security and peace of mind. Her malleable personality is antithetical to that of the strong Andromache. She believes everything that her Saviour tells her, and begs to be taken away before vengeance arrives, back to the subjection of parental rule, where safety lies in obedience to custom. With Neoptolemus permanently disposed of, Orestes is free to transfer Hermione's subjection to himself. She leaves with him, and her fate can be but imagined.

Although Orestes says that he has killed Neoptolemus in revenge for a slight, in reality it is for political expediency. By ensuring Hermione's legitimate freedom from marriage, Sparta and Argos can form a useful alliance. Hermione is an innocent and trusting toy in the men's game.

Andromache, the slave, finds her own peace and security because she is intelligent and courageous and capable of existing in a man's world on equal, if not superior, terms. Hermione, princess of Sparta and queen of Phthia, is overwhelmed by circumstances, a slave to an emotional imagination and manipulated by men for their own use. Both women have been subjected to the influence of a long and bitter war : one has survived her fate; it is not certain that the other will be strong enough to do so.

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(b) Slavery - suffering brutalises, but it, also, ennobles  
Hecuba

"--The Euripidean Hecuba has left to subsequent literatures an authoritative and compelling image of human suffering under the reversal of fortune." (Arrowsmith, William (1958), p. 2).

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For more than two thousand years, "Hecuba" retained popularity and esteem with a discerning intellectual public who recogized and appreciated the truths embodied in the central character.

Hecuba is, not only, a woman subjected to the traumata of captivity, she is, also, Woman, representative of the living defeated, caught in the net of war's aftermath, and enmeshed by the clinging tentacles of an amorality in which ruthlessness, deception and self-interest are the norms of behaviour. Her survival is dependent upon political expediency which fulfils the needs of any one particular moment or situation. Where it is essential for those in control to retain power, the concept of necessity is used, or rather, misused, as a medium, or excuse, for action. The motivation is primarily self-oriented. Any object or person which is in the way, which weakens the hold upon power, loses all right of humane consideration. An adjustable morality becomes self-justifying and man creates his own ego-centred god, who does not accept the existence of any emotion which may interfere with his continuing security, won so hardly in the violence of protracted physical conflict. The after-effects of war, especially upon those whose equilibrium has alredy been disturbed, contain the possibility of a process of dehumanization.

Evil dominates this bitter tragedy. The shining jewel of innocent beauty and youthful idealism is, itself, pitilessly crushed by a travesty of religious belief. For the sake of retaining mass-control, the customary animal sacrifice is substituted by the human; an action of such inhumanity that it brings shame to the victor and glory to the victim. Hecuba, as a prisoner of unbearable memories, attempts to exist surrounded by treachery, ingratitude and moral cowardice, until the effort to maintain contact with reality in such an environment breaks down, and she escapes into her own contrived unreality, in which the unnaturally vicious is justified as a moral necessity.

In performing an act of horrifying cruelty, she has adopted the current ethos of her masters. Hecuba is excusable and an object of pity, because, although she appears to be coldly and logically sane, she cannot be held fully responsible for what she has done. Her cumulative suffering has destroyed all feeling for and knowledge of civilised behaviour. Her masters, too, appear to be sane, but they are aware of what they have done and of what they are doing, and they acknowledge their responsibility for deeds which they regard as right and proper : their chosen end justifies any means. Mad Hecuba, though sanctimoniously condemned, has become a fitting inmate of their crazed world.

The Peloponnesian War, with but little glory for the Athenians, dragged on into an unforeseeable future. Was Euripides intending a warning as to its moral dangers? In employing a theme of traditional legend and making it relevant to his own day, did he imagine that his message would be equally significant to all peoples through time? In allowing Hecuba, woman and foreigner, to be the focal point,

he satisfied the expectations of his audience who would not be surprised to witness irrational behaviour from a female barbarian. The more perceptive, more intellectually aware, however, must have realised that the woman's origins were irrelevant. What mattered was the effects of war upon an individual, who could as easily have been Spartan, or even, Athenian.

It is rather sad that the academic specialist should not be prepared to accept the possibility of near-perfection in an artist's work, without finding some fault of which to complain. Once again, one is made aware of the familiar criticism relating to episodic discontinuity; which is strange, for the separate parts are patently interlinked by the forceful presence and intentions of Hecuba, supported by her women. Each internal climax leads towards the certainty of the horrible denouement. Step by logical step, we are witnesses to a realistic psychological explanation - the disintegration of a personality. Without hope of truth, justice or moral order, civilised attributes are, gradually, abandoned, until the social identity is lost in a nightmare world of insecurity and continuous pain. Polymestor's crazed near-animality is a vocalised and visual reflection of that which Hecuba has become. At the beginning of the play she is near breaking point; by the end, she is broken and quite lost. The gods are indifferent; men are worthless; there is no solid foundation; all is slipping away into a void.

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With imaginative originality, Euripides gives the prologue to a Ghost, which, immediately establishes an atmosphere of suspenseful tension. Whatever it has to say

it will, assuredly, not be good news. The news is, in fact, disastrous, and we are made aware of treachery and violence, the embodiments of an evil which is to dominate the play: this poor Ghost is the shade of, what was, the one surviving prince of Troy. Sent to Polymestor of Thrace for safe-keeping he is killed by this man, as soon as Troy is defeated. Polymestor breaks three moral laws; he betrays a trust, for greed; he disregards the tenets of hospitality; he denies ritual burial to the murdered.

His impermanent state allows Polydorus to have access to information as yet unknown to the people concerned, and of which we now are made aware. His sister, Polyxena, is to be sacrificed to placate the spirit of Achilles, an unnatural act acceded to by the Greeks, fearful of the dead warrior, but more fearful of the living troops.

Treachery, disloyalty, fear and expediency already control the course of the action -- "And you, poor Mother, you must see/your two last children dead this day." (Ls.45-6)<sup>1</sup>.

It does not require prior knowledge of Hecuba's story for one to become interested in her current situation. She has been a queen and is now a slave, with all that that implies. She has witnessed the destruction of her city and its people. Throughout the years, the pain of loss and the experience of suffering have been her daily companions. She has, now, reached the nadir of supportable existence -- "--shorn of greatness, pride, and everything but life,/which leaves you slavery and bitterness/and lonely age." (Ls.56-7) She staggers as she enters, worn by hardship and weakened by the terror of a prophetic dream - that the two remaining children are in danger of imminent death. The fact that the

1. Euripides *III*. pp. 9-68 (Grane and Lattimore, 1958).

audience is already aware of this adds to the emotional involvement with her. She learns, all too soon, that, at least, part of her dream is to come true -- Polyxena is to die. Odysseus, the arch-deceiver, using the essential need to honour the dead as an expedient necessity, sways the balance of debate and ensures that no reprieve is possible -- "And in the end he won,/asking what one slave was worth/when laid in the balance/with the honour of Achilles." (Ls.134-6) Cynical, armoured against any compassionate consideration for suffering, this is the man who is Hecuba's master, to whom she must plead for mercy. His cold-blooded and cruel rationality is balanced by the strength and purity of the young girl, as yet uncorrupted by the influence of moral sickness. Full of a loving and caring pity for her mother; unselfish, courageous, idealistically willing to sacrifice a life which has come to have no more meaning for her. -- "I do not care to live,/but call it happiness to die." (Ls.214-5). Untainted victim of war, she ennobles an unnecessary act of bestial violence exacted by a man degraded by war.

Even in desperate circumstances, when the reason knows that the situation is irrecoverable, one clings to hope as a means of maintaining mental stability. Hecuba begs for a pity which does not exist. She reminds Odysseus of past favours, of the fickleness of fortune. She invokes the law which -- "--applies to slave and free without distinction." (L.291) She is distraught and without pride, humiliating herself before the victor. To no avail. Polyxena does not plead. Proudly, she shows her contempt for him, a contempt mixed with pity, for he is quite unable to accept the thought of her supplication. She will go with him willingly, for

slavery is unendurable --"With eyes still free, I now renounce the light/and dedicate myself to death." (Ls.367-8). The girl's nobility tears the mother's heart. Death is, indeed, preferable to a life in which memories offer a perpetually recurring agony --"I died of sorrow while I was still alive." (L.431). She is alone, now. The women express her desolation in a moving song of grief, surrounding and protecting her, as she lies in the dust and dirt.

Talthybius is the antithesis of Odysseus. A kindly man, pitying the dispossessed and concerned for the feelings of the bereaved. He comes to tell Hecuba of Polyxena's death. With a loving obsessiveness, she demands to know every detail. Talthybius is, almost, too moved to tell her -- "-- for I was crying when your daughter died,/and I will cry again while telling you." (Ls.519-20). Polyxena has died unflinchingly, with a man's courage. Not sustained by a mystical ecstasy, but fully aware of everything and everyone around her; applauded by the soldiers, lauded by the perceptive, she is an exceptional branch of a proud stock -- "I count you/of all women the one most blessed in her children/and also the unhappiest" (Ls.581-3). Kindly meant, but of small consolation to Hecuba as she considers the child's wasted beauty of character, destroyed to satisfy a religio-political necessity. "The cruelty of the sentence on Polyxena is transmuted by the heroism of Polyxena, herself, to an episode of awe-inspiring beauty." Sh(Vellacott, Philip, (1963), p.10).

Little time seems to have elapsed between the decision to sacrifice and the actual deed. No sooner has Hecuba been told the fatal news than the girl's life is ended. The reality of what has happened now hits her, and she begins to



understand that she cannot support continual emotional shock: shadows of unreality begin to encroach upon her sanity. Inconsolable, she is, yet, proud. Her loss and loneliness are painful to watch. Her remaining strength re-establishes a degree of rationality. The burial rites must be fulfilled, the women are asked to fetch water to wash the body -- sea-water -- there is something ominous about those words, and we remember the lost spirit who began the play. What will happen to Hecuba now?

The dramatist wastes no time in presenting his second terrible climax. Polydorus' corpse is discovered and brought back to his mother, so that he may, finally, rest in peace. She cannot believe it. She can feel her grasp on reality slipping again; endlessly mourning, an anguish is what her life has become. How did he die? Murdered. Why did he die? A lust for gold killed him. And the murderer? The faithful friend has proved to be a treacherous thief. How can one retain any sense of moral equilibrium in such an atmosphere of ever-increasing evil. There must be -- "some absolute, some moral order/or principle of law more final still," (Ls.800-1) by means of which existence, both for gods and men, is possible, and good and evil definable and recognizable. If a wrong goes unpunished, unrevenged, then justice, too, is tainted and corrupt. She is now filled with the need for revenge, the need to hurt with a pain equal to that which has been inflicted upon her. She cannot stop talking; persuading, arguing with Agamemnon as to the right of her cause, the moral right of justice for the unforgivable injury. She shows her gradual descent towards the inhumane, not with an excited hysteria, but with a cold, clear and ruthless logic, dominated by the strength of the

one thought - that punishment shall be exacted for cruelty, the betrayal of trust, the destruction of faith. Agamemnon, however, is not prepared to be the medium of retribution. It is all very sad, but he cannot run the risk of displeasing his fellows by conniving in the death of any ally. He is a slave of necessity. War has degraded him, too. His lack of moral courage is contemptible. Where he is weak, Hecuba is resolute, single-minded in her purpose. She, a woman, with her women to help her, will assume the retributive role.

She is, now, unnaturally calm and controlled, awaiting the traitor's arrival. The evident falseness of his greeting reinforces her intention. Her duplicity is more than equal to his. She baits him, catching the lies as they rise. Knowing his greed, she tempts him with greater wealth and, gradually entices him, with his children, into the tent, where her women are waiting. The brief hiatus of tense expectation is suddenly filled with the sound of unbearable pain, but, more terrifying still, the women are utterly silent -- until Hecuba, blood in her mind as well as on her hands, returns exultant, glorying in the vicious cruelty of their actions -- "I have killed your sons and you are blind!" (L.1047).

Polymestor is crazed with pain and grief. The women's revenge is terrible, hideously inhuman, but, under the terms of Hecuba's newly-adopted ethos, learned as a result of observation and experience, it is just. Polymestor has proved to be -- "-- a man who betrayed his trust,/who killed against the laws of man and god,/faithless, evil, corrupt." (Ls.1233-5).

She has exacted a punishment which is fitting to the environment in which she is now forced to exist. What would

once have been abhorrent is, now, become acceptable. She, the victim of war, has descended to the same level as her victors, where love and good are weakness, and hatred and evil are strength. The nobility of Polyxena shines through the sordid murk, like a star of hope.

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(c) Slavery - war's immediate aftermath

The Trojan Women

"The play's denunciations of such horrors stirs the conscience and the fears of our own century with enough force to place it among the most often performed of Euripides' plays." (Vellacott, Philip (1954), p.16).

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The people had been subjected to sixteen years of conflict, interspersed by plague and defeat, as well as the occasional victory and periods of temporary peace. It was during one of these less martial moments that the play was first presented. The fact that the tetralogy, of which it formed the final tragedy, gained a second prize, says a great deal for the Athenian practice of democracy, and, perhaps also, for the influential strength of the Peace Party whose existence was recognized and permitted.

This particular oasis of calm coincided with a trend towards economic recovery, largely possible through a considerable increase in a slave labour-force. This same democracy which allowed free speech was, also, responsible for the subjugation of fellow-Greeks. Such action brought shame upon the political ideal, and, even to a society conditioned to the acceptance of slavery, must have caused moral concern to the more sensitive and spiritually aware. Even at this period of continuing uncertainty, the apparent

improved financial situation enticed the state towards the idea of furthering conquest and colonisation, with a particular eye on Sicily. A costly expeditionary force set sail in 415. This unwarranted act of aggression was to have the disastrous consequence of total defeat, two years' later.

To endeavour to interpret an artist's work in terms of dogmatic assumption is considered to be an intellectual presumption. One may speculate, one may present divers possibilities, but one should not, unless the author is at hand to argue, present a personal evaluation as a categorical fact.

Influenced by the total environmental context, therefore, one could say that the educational message of this play is related to four possibilities -- war, peace, slavery and unprovoked aggression. One of these taken as an interpretative factor would provide a satisfactory medium of moral warning. Taken as a fourfold possibility, the play's impact is increased, didactically and dramatically. If emphasis is given to one factor which, however, is still linked to, and influenced by, the others, the play becomes even more theatrically interesting. Slavery is the result of an act of aggression: unprovoked aggression is a form of punishable hubris. War destroys and degrades. Peace, however ephemeral, should be used for good and not evil ends. With peace, there is no further opportunity to enslave. To say that the play is primarily concerned with one, only, of these factors is, it is felt, to oversimplify the intentions of a very intelligent and sensitive artist. He would, naturally, see what was happening to his city and its society, and what might happen in the future. He was brave enough to share his fears with a very large audience of attentive listeners. He was clever enough to express these

fears in a tautly structured tragedy, in which there is minimum action but maximum emotion. A tragedy which is centred upon and built around a group of defeated, anguished and desolate women who have become enslaved; victims, without hope, of a futile war - an act of unprovoked aggression effected in order to satisfy Greek male-pride.

As an integral part of Athenian society, it is unlikely that the slaves' position excited compassion or doubt as to its morality. Slaves were necessary to the social and economic fabric of the state. However, as the prosecution of the war included male-massacre and female and child enslavement of those who were Greek, the situation must surely, have aroused a questioning response in, at least, some morally-conscious people. It may, also, have occurred to the perceptive, like Euripides, that, if Athens were defeated, this might be their citizens' fate, too. It may, perhaps, also have occurred to Euripides that it was morally necessary, and would certainly be dramatically interesting to investigate the psychology of slavery, in two basic areas -- the manner of enslavement, involving the traumata of the loss of freedom and the changed life-style; and the matter of slavery, involving individual reaction and adjustment. The public examination of such pain would become a reinforcement of the neglected obvious -- that war is debasing and not glorious, and that women, and children, are, invariably, the victims of martial activities initiated by men.

It has, already, been noted that the three extant plays on the subject of the Trojan War were created in reverse temporal order. The first two, "Andromache" and "Hecuba" deal with slavery as it affects the individual. "The Trojan

Women" concerns itself with the slavery of a specific section of society. The fact that this group is mainly composed of members of the upper-class exaggerates their new role, by contrast. The increasing number of slaves in the community may have stimulated the direction and interpretation of the play's theme.

"The Trojan Women" is a play about women in direful circumstances arising from defeat. It is physically static, but richly alive in its emotionally reactive response to a continuity of shocking events. Hecuba, as the link-figure, remains in the acting-area and in view of the audience throughout, as effective in silence as in speech. She is queen and matriarch. Cassandra, her virgin daughter, is dedicated to Apollo and is a prophetess. Andromache is wife, widow, mother. Whether maritally or spiritually, they have all been involved in relationships of a loving dependency. Their status-identity and its associated self-image are lost in war's aftermath, leaving a void to be filled by the newly-enforced role of captive servant. Ironically, the only one who has not changed is Helen. Self-controlled and intelligent, she is still able to use her very able wits to manipulate the opposite sex.

So much sorrow could have been avoided if the course of wisdom and diplomacy had been followed, and peace maintained - for - it is wiser to forgive; revenge for the past is folly.

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Euripides' prologue pleases public expectation, confirming their belief in the gods' power to control men's actions. Their behaviour is so ungodlike, however, that we suspect an ironic intention. We learn that the conquerors

will not have everything their own way, that desecration of the holy places carries an inevitable punishment -- storm and shipwreck en route for home. This is a clever opening. The gods' animosity, although tending towards the immaturely vindictive, creates a sympathetic reaction in preparation for the next scene. Hecuba, alone in her desolation, unaccustomed to physical hardship, mourns for her city, her family, herself -- " -- an old, unhappy ~~woman~~ <sup>woman</sup>,/like my city ruined and pitiful" -- (Ls.141-2)<sup>1</sup>, a queen who now lies in the dust. She is joined by the women, still numbed with the shock of transition from freedom to slavery. They are fearful and uncertain. To whom will they be allotted? Assuredly, they will be separated from each other, from everything which denotes security. Where will they be taken? Talthybius arrives to satisfy their pain-filled anxiety. Mother-love is stronger than self-concern. Hecuba thinks first of her daughters. Cassandra, the celibate religious, is to become Agamemnon's concubine; Andromache will go to Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, her husband's killer; Polyxena -- the answer is ambiguous and Hecuba is unable to pursue further questioning. She is Odysseus' choice -- " -- that mouth of lies and treachery, that makes void/faith in things promised/and that which was beloved turns to hate." (Ls.284-6)

The careless cruelty of the allocation is apparent. Peace and the safe happiness of love are memories. The future is barren of hope. Cassandra, unhinged by all that she has seen, and by that which she is yet to experience, expresses hysterically all the pain which they are proudly struggling to keep hidden. Hecuba cares for her, tenderly, lovingly, heartsore, as Cassandra finds satisfaction in her

1 Euripides III pp. 127-175 (Greene and Lattimore, 1958).

own form of revenge, foretelling the destruction of the house of Atreus -- "--it is by marriage that I bring/to destruction those whom you and I have hated most." (Ls.404-5). Hatred dominates her thoughts. Odysseus, her mother's master, he, too, will suffer. She is gone, never to see her kin again, except in death. Hecuba relives the painful horrors of the immediate past, anticipating the drudgery of an unhappy future, an old, lonely and desolate woman. The chorus echo her memory-filled grief, remembering the cries of the terrified children when -- "War stalked from his hiding-place." (L.560).

.Andromache's entrance brings Hecuba back to a present in which shock succeeds shock, in rapid succession -- "-- our pain lies deep under pain piled over." (L.596). The sight of his discarded weapons brings Hector, the most gallant of her sons, vividly to mind - but he is dead. Dead, too, is Polyxena. Talthybius' careful ambiguity is now understood. She has been ruthlessly sacrificed in order to satisfy a dead Greek. Andromache envies the girl's departure from humiliation and sorrow, but Hecuba retains her inner strength which encourages a hope, the possibility that perhaps, one day, Troy may be restored, through Hector's small son. While he lives, there is still this hope. He is not to be allowed to live, however. He is too dangerous. Odysseus has recommended that he should be killed. The Greeks are barbarians; the gods heartless and unjust. Andromache has been an exemplary wife and mother, her children's future secure, safe in the warm protection of love, but everything has been lost through the false love of one unfaithful wife, Helen. One cannot fight against those whose moral standards are incomprehensible. There is nothing to be done



but submit. She does not have enough strength to bid Hecuba farewell, and the old woman is left to suffer alone. Her family is gone. She is the only one left. The Chorus weep for their city; god-loved, god-destroyed.

It is at this moment of unendurable desolation, that Helen is pushed into sight by her captors, even under such circumstances, using her sexuality as a defensive weapon. She encounters Menelaus. It is obvious who is the stronger, and Hecuba warns the husband, in case he's forgotten, of his wife's charm-filled duplicity. As the focal point of a bloody conflict, she has survived, beautiful, clever and devious. Menelaus looks and wavers. Hecuba, seeing the indecision, forgets that he is an enemy, and remembers only that she is a woman who hates and distrusts Helen -- "You worked hard: not to make yourself a better woman,/but to make sure always to be on the winning side." (Ls.1008-9). Unsubmissive, carefully groomed, Helen's appearance, compared to her own, is the last straw -- immodest, unrepentant to the last. -- We good, upright women, faithful to our vows and our duties, condemn her -- "Thus make it the custom toward all womankind/hereafter, that the price of adultery is death." (Ls.1031-2). Helen pleads for life, Hecuba for death. It is obvious that Menelaus will be defeated. The women continue their lament, for the loss of everything they held dear; lost because of the one who is about to go unpunished.

Hecuba and the women wait. Life and death have passed before her, rested a moment and then departed. She has dwelt upon memories of love; she has experienced a useless hate. Over all is an unbearable suffering, the loneliness of loss, the fear of change, the unthinkable future. One

task remains. One last act of love for the recently dead; innocence destroyed by fear; a death which is -- "The epitaph of Greek shame." (L.1191). Astyanax, son of Hector, is returned to her arms. Tenderly, she prepares him for burial, the last hope gone. He will be at peace with his kin -- "Among the dead your father will take care of you." (L.1234). Such a little, lost child, so cruelly murdered. She has reached a quietism which armours and sustains. Her withdrawal into herself, her temporary peace are shattered by the sight and sound of burning. Troy is to be destroyed, utterly. She rouses herself -- "Come, aged feet; make one last weary struggle, that I/may hail my city in its affliction." (Ls.1275-6). As Odysseus' property, she is not allowed the right to kill herself. As a slave, choice is no longer hers.

The burning of Troy activates an almost hysterical response from the women. Their cries gain in strength as the flames leap higher. They call upon their dead, beating their fists upon the ground. This is the end of home and freedom. This is the beginning of an unbearable captivity -- "-- this is the way. Forward:/into the slave's life." (Ls.1329-30). Their past is buried in the fallen city.

Victims of violence, cruelty and amorality, their pain is the pain of all those who are war's leavings, slaves to circumstance.

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(d) Slavery - deliberate sacrifice of the innocent  
Iphigenia in Aulis

"The nobility and worth of Iphigenia's action, therefore, is quite independent of either the worthiness of the cause or the motives of those who send her to her death. Her sacrifice is a kind of absolute good that transcends all the rational cynicism around her." (Walker, Charles R. (1958), p.214).

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When a situation becomes insupportable and the fatigue of disillusionment inhibits the activation of spiritual consolation, there is a tendency to wish to escape from an impossible present to another environment which promises peace of mind. Not only was Euripides unpopular as an artist, because of the individuality of his approach, but the warning messages contained in his work were unrecognized, or, if recognized, disregarded.

Macedonia offered a warmly welcoming refuge, where he would be honoured and protected, and far from the immediacy of conflict. It is understandable if an old, saddened man should choose to exile himself from his city to find peace. Though he had escaped from war's actuality, however, he could not prevent its continuing presence in his mind. In immediate daily contact with it, he had written about its effect upon people, upon the community. In distancing himself, his vision could encompass its entirety. He could examine the morality of war - as a whole, and the inter-relationship between good and evil, where the latter can manipulate the former to its own advantage, but where the very nature of the former can produce exceptional actions which can inspire and change individuals within its orbit. Recognition of the presence of good can diminish the power of

evil. In Aeschylean terms -- good will prevail.

"Iphigenia in Aulis" was Euripides' last creation, uncompleted at his death. It is reputed to have been finished and produced by a relation, probably his son. There are, therefore, divers opinions as to the authorship of the various parts. The neo-comedy elements are considered by Philip Vellacott<sup>13</sup> as un-Euripidean; there appears to be general agreement as to the unacceptability of both prologue and exodos. The latter, particularly, whilst not alien to Euripides' later mocking endings, detracts from the dramatic effect of the whole. Nonetheless, enough of the original ~~manuscript~~ intentions remain to enable judgment to be made. What is regarded in some quarters as an over-theatrical treatment of the plot has led to its evaluation as second-rate. (H.D.F. Kitto<sup>23</sup>), and its classification as a melodrama. (John Ferguson<sup>37</sup> and Oliver Taplin<sup>42</sup>)

Subjective appreciation leads to the consideration that the play is, more importantly, a study of morality, within the particular anticipatory atmosphere of armed men not yet engaged in hostilities. Such men are dangerous. If not controlled they will mutiny and annihilate the command. The few, therefore, fear the majority and become slaves to the need for placatory action, in order to save their own skins. They use, misuse, religious belief as a means of rationalising the situation. Artemis prevents the advance to Troy. Artemis will permit movement if human sacrifice is made. The commanders knew all about mass-psychology. The soldiery would forget their grievances in the pleasure of watching the death of a beautiful young virgin, a pleasure heightened by the fact that this was the chief's daughter. The victim, innocent, trusting and idealistic, offers herself

1. Vellacott, Philip. (1972)

2. Kitto H.D.F. (1920)

3. Ferguson, John (1972)

4. Taplin, Oliver (1978)

willingly as patriotic saviour. She, alone, is free to choose. She, alone, has the courage to dedicate herself to that action of unequalled good -- for a cause that is intrinsically evil. That is her tragedy. She is, thus, sacrifice, but not martyr.

Men who value their own need for power, their own greed for gold, above all else, are slaves to amorality. Those whose self-preservation is based upon mob-rule are slaves to that mob. Those who are prepared to use the spiritual belief of others for their own selish ends are slaves to nihilism. They are despicable, but, in their rejection of truth and goodness, they are to be pitied.

Like Polyxena, Iphigenia is a light of hope in the darkness. Filled with love's strength, she conquers self to become an example of goodness in surroundings of evil.

This is one aspect. There is another, not as pleasant, but, considering Euripides' experiences, and his possible reasons for leaving Athens, more probable.

In times of crisis, the "adults", that is, the more worldly-experienced members of society, can see a potential source of national protection in the idealism of its youth. The first Great War is a painful example; by the second, a degree of cynicism had crept in; by the time of Vietnam, this cynicism had become overt and openly defiant of accepted custom and expectation.

After such a long war, Euripides must have seen so many young people going to their deaths for idealistic notions of patriotism, uselessly and wastefully destroyed. Iphigenia is those young people. The play is their requiem.

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Although Iphigenia does not appear until Line 590, and

speak until Line 631, she is the focus of our awareness from the start.

The troops are bored, restless and mutinous. Agamemnon, in a state of moral cowardice and fearful of his safety, has bowed to the persuasive machinations of Odysseus and Menelaus, aided by the useful Calchas, to sacrifice his daughter to Artemis, in exchange for fair sailing-weather. The soldiers' superstitious ignorance was to be satisfied by a travesty of religious belief, thus safeguarding the status of the hierarchy. These are not Homeric heroes, but men whose self-interest will accept any available expedient. With unconcerned cruelty, Clytemnestra is enticed to Aulis with her daughter, with the promise of the girl's marriage to the godlike Achilles. To his small credit, Agamemnon regrets the weakness of his acquiescence and, soothing his conscience, sends word to Argos that the journey is not to be undertaken. As, however, the messenger whom he chooses is old and is unlikely to arrive in time, this is merely a gesture in which he does not believe. An angry Menelaus, having intercepted the aged runner, tries to re-impose Agamemnon's acceptance of the original scheme. He refuses. One feels that this is rather because his brother antagonises him than that he is sincere in his intentions: like Achilles, he is a bag of wind. "You may choose madness," he says, "But I will order my affairs in decency and honour." (Ls.401-2)<sup>1</sup>. We do not believe in this. The dispute is interrupted by the reported arrival of the queen's party, and we are presented with the painful pretence of the marriage and the thought of the girl's joyful expectancy. Menelaus doesn't have much time, but enough to work on his brother. Let's forget about Helen, abandon the whole project and send

<sup>1</sup> Euripides *IV* pp. 217-300 (Grene and Lattimore, 1958).

the men back home. He knows perfectly well that, not only, is Agamemnon too proud to do this, but that the troops would refuse to go. The decision, never really rescinded, is re-established. Iphigenia will die -- "-- But we have arrived/At a fatal place: A compulsion absolute/Now works the slaughter of the child." (Ls.511-13).

This is the murky atmosphere, full of discord, deceit, expediency, cowardice and treachery, into which the young girl, so happily steps. Euripides must have realised that, although her characterisation would ensure her predominance, some other, aesthetically pleasing, support was also needed to relieve the darkness of evil. The Chorus is composed of charming young women and is the medium of beauty, in its song, and rationality, in its moral comment. Their youthful innocence and intuitive wisdom reflect the solitary innocent who is to be sacrificed. In matter and manner, they are the antithesis of the surrounding adult-world -- "Yet a straight path is always the right one;/And lessons deeply taught/Lead man to paths of righteousness." (Ls.560-2). It is right that they should be the ones who welcome Iphigenia to her last home -- "Gently and without clamour/We who are strangers too/Give you our welcome." (Ls.606-8). Compassionate and kindly where Clytemnestra is excitably fussy and self-important, how much do they know? They have been present during the previous scene. They have been told to watch their speech. How much have they learned during their brief visit? They will surround Iphigenia with the support of their loving pity. Even though she is unaware of them, they will be there.

Iphigenia speaks; one can feel the spontaneous charm of her personality. She cares for her mother, but she loves

her father. She can sense the constraint between her parents and is considerate of her mother's feelings as she runs to greet the father. She loves him deeply, is aware of his disquiet, watching his face, his eyes for some clue, that she might aid him. The knowledge, which we and the man have, fills this scene, with its irony and double-meanings, with a consistent poignancy. She is to go on a long lonely journey, but first, a sacrifice must be made -- "Then round the altar shall I start the dance?" (L.676). She will not be dancing. It is difficult to imagine how any man, let alone a father, could be unresponsive to such a simple, devoted and trusting love, such happiness in his presence. Yet, he is so far in his mire of evil that he has betrayed her trust as soon as she is out of sight. He becomes involved in plans for the pretended marriage. Clytemnestra is interested only in the social advantages to be gained from being connected with a near-god. Agamemnon would like her out of the way. She insists upon fulfilling her ritual role. She is self-confident and domineering, determined to have her own way. She is a danger to Agamemnon, an argumentative wife who won't be controlled -- "A wise man keeps his wife at home/Virtuous and helpful - or never marries." (Ls.749-50). In contrasting the mother and daughter in such a way, our attention and sympathy are focussed even more upon the girl.

Agamemnon's anxiety as to the desirability of Clytemnestra's continued presence is soon justified. Gushingly, she meets an astonished and embarrassed Achilles, who knows nothing of the intended marriage. Her humiliation and his pompous puzzlement soon change to anguish and anger when the old man, the former unfortunate messenger, tells



them the truth. It is not believable. She, and she thinks of herself first, and the girl have been trapped -- but -- Achilles, the brave and honourable, he will not allow this vile thing to happen. Unfortunately the hero, like his suppliant, is considering his own safety; self-justification in words, not deeds. He is a cold, self-opinionated egoist who has no intention of doing anything which might harm his self-image. The Chorus can see through him and, and watch, ironically. Clytemnestra doubts, but who else is there?

Her father, her mother, Achilles -- these are the people upon whose trust and care Iphigenia depends, and they all betray her. Innocence is destroyed by evil, and the Chorus song of Achilles' birth and Iphigenia's death, and of the breakdown of morality -- "When the blasphemers rule,/And heedless men/Thrust righteousness behind them,/When lawlessness rules law,/And no man-or his neighbor - fears the jealousy of God?" (Ls.1092-7)

Iphigenia is aware of what is to happen. Presumably, her mother has told her. Does she hope that the child's love for her father will turn to a hatred similar to her own? Iphigenia confronts him. He is not aware that she knows. She cannot bear to look at him. He is still play-acting, even when his wife makes a direct accusation, he prevaricates like the moral coward he is. He is quite unable to say the words in front of the weeping child, witness to his rejection of responsibility for the closest kinship-bond. Her mother pleads for her, but this is a strange form of pleading, it is full of herself. As Iphigenia watches and listens to these two adults accountable for her thread-like future, her despair grows. She pleads for herself, simply, sincerely,

beautifully and most movingly. She calls upon the past, upon love and kinship, upon her youth, her fear of death and the dark. She is alone and frightened, in the control of adult self-concern.

Agamemnon, deaf and blind to her love, attempts justification once more. The scapegoat is no longer Helen but the Greek army: he is afraid. The sacrifice is essential if Greece is to be made safe from invasion; he exaggerates somewhat. This is the most cruel thing which he could possibly have found to say. The child is in a high state of emotional tension. A new light is thrown upon her role. She has a reason to die - for her country -- and her father, having completed his work of deception, leaves her. He, whom she loves so much, goes without one word of comfort, one sign of his regard. He runs away.

Another potential saviour proves to be equally unreliable, promising the impossible which he knows that he cannot fulfil. This is Achilles, the lauded warrior, whom she was to marry -- was that really true? She listens to his imagined valour. She has no more faith in this type of adult-world. She clings to her new-found rationale, and she finds a courage and a resolution which bring shame to her listeners. She is to be the saviour of Greece -- "I am the possessed of my country/And you, Mother, bore me for all Greece,/Not for yourself alone." (Ls.1386-7). She is the representative of self-deception by idealism, her intellect betrayed by her emotions. She romanticises war and cannot see that the actions of both sides are equally barbarous. She is filled with ecstasy for such a sacrifice, made possible by a loving father, and she sings her paean of farewell to life.

The beauty of the poetry, the exceptional nature of the girl, make the truth even more bitter, and Euripides' assumed intention even more pointed. Iphigenia, the idealist, has been killed by lies. The tragedy is, that without those lies, death would not have been bearable. Under such circumstances, the moral guilt of those who instigate the lies is greater, for they are aware of the influence of the deception upon the emotionally impressionable. Iphigenia, the idealist, thought that she was a saviour, but she was a victim of those who were slaves to power and greed. Whether she was substituted by another innocent creature, and translated to heaven or to Tauris, is irrelevant. It is, also, a dramatic anti-climax. The fact remains that the sacrifice was intended - and carried out.

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## B. Love

### (a) which saves

#### Alcestis

"He [Euripides] gives Alcestis full honours. The beginning of the play is all hers, and she is the center of all memories throughout the play." (Lattimore, Richmond (1955), p.3).

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This is the earliest extant play by Euripides. The complete tetralogy gained him a second prize; the victor's crown being awarded to the rival, Sophocles. It uses a theme familiar to cultural history that of love and self-sacrifice. It had been used by Phrynichus as the subject of a satyr-play, and it was in that position that Euripides included it, as part of a tetralogy dealing with the subject of women and death.

Whatever humour the original audience may have expected

to find has been lost en route through time. When tragedy is a universal, the appreciation of humour, while basically a universal is, also, influenced by its temporal context. It is difficult to raise more than a faint, fleeting smile at the drunken Heracles. The sorrow-filled surroundings in which he finds himself are not conducive even to a titter, but rather, the despairing acceptance of social maladroitness. Heracles is not a clown and a modern audience would find it odd that he should be thus portrayed. Similarly, the agon between Admetus and his father, seemingly another occasion for mirth, is bitingly cruel and full of an unforgiving bitterness. Statements are made which contravene the foundations of custom anent the responsibility for, and between, the kin. To extract any mirth from such a scene would require over-playing on a gross level, or a superficiality of mutual mockery, both, destroying atmosphere and emotional balance. It is hard to see how the scene can be played other than in accord with the apparent demands of the text.

Euripides was a very original and sensitive artist. Of the three great dramatists, he is the most modern. His presentation of naturalistic characters in realistic situations is the most easily comprehensible to the present. Though his audience expected the orthodox treatment of the last play, maybe he did not intend it as a comedy at all. He may have attempted to please by providing questionably comic scenes, and making a contrived happy ending to what is, basically, a tragic story. One is absorbed in speculation as to the manner of production. The play is reputed to have been unpopular because of the nature of its interpretation. Did the actors exaggerate and distort in

order to find a humour which, in fact, was never intended to be there? So that public expectation might be satisfied, did they try to force their presentation into the satyr-play genre?

If it is difficult to determine the artist's intention for his contemporary society, even with the aid of presumptuous supposition, the solution is no less difficult for the present, for the play is complex and ambiguous, using different levels and varying moods, classifiable as tragi-comedy because of its happily resolved ending. The realism of the tragedy becomes the unreality of the miraculous, requiring a suspension of artistic disbelief. Is Alcestis real only to Admetus? Can our imagination bridge that questioning gap? Or are we being fooled? Was Euripides dangerously mocking institutionalized superstition? Is this a moral device to illustrate the possibility of the second chance? It can be seen that Euripides has brought an especial theatricality to the manner of his creation, a theatricality which adds to its interest and encourages the stimulation of controversy.

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As a reward for his considerably hospitable treatment of Apollo, during a period of the god's enforced servitude, Admetus of Thessaly is granted an exceptional boon, release from death, if he can find a substitute. When the time comes, there is nobody who is prepared to take such a step, save his wife. She duly dies. Heracles, an old guest-friend, is made aware of the situation when on a visit. The reciprocal obligations of hospitality are such that, like Apollo before him, Heracles wishes to show his gratitude and he determines to fight Death, so that Alcestis may be

restored to husband and home. He is successful. His love for Admetus has conquered Death.

"Alcestis", therefore, is about three inter-linking things -- love, death and hospitality. The first two are bases of existence. The last-named, while specific to the social mores of Euripides' contemporary and, indeed, preceding societies, is, also, applicable to all communities, everywhere. Reciprocal hospitality engenders amity, generosity and loyalty, and, thus, peace-filled relationships.

It is about love. Where Iphigenia's natural love became, through shock, idealised and abstract, Alcestis' love is concrete in the reality of its power. She is not dying for an ideal, for self-glorification, but because she loves, simply, directly, single-mindedly, one person beyond all others, even her children, and is prepared to die for him. This woman and her theme dominate, influencing the thoughts, actions, lives of those with whom she has associated. The beauty of her character and the determined courage of her self-sacrifice run like a strand, weaving the parts together. Not only does she save her husband's life, but she is the catalyst for his moral regeneration, the medium of self-knowledge. She restores the tranquility of peace to her disordered home. As she gives love, so love surrounds her.

Both G.M.A. Grube<sup>1</sup> and Richmond Lattimore<sup>2</sup> consider that Alcestis' dramatic importance is ancillary to that of Admetus. One can see the validity of their opinion, for, here, we have a study of a man's personal tragedy, a situation stemming from the weakness of fear, who is brought to the realisation of his true self through the pain and loneliness of loss, the regret for an irreclaimable past, the

1. Grube, G.M.A. (1941)

rejection of a, now, unwanted future. He learns the nature of love when it is too late. Even when he is given his second chance, by reason of Heracles' intervention, it is not certain that he does not put friendship before love. He had promised Alcestis that no other woman should take her place. Heracles' insistence upon his adoption of the soi-disant slave as an implied substitute wife, and his eventual agreement, mean that he has changed his order of priorities and broken his word. Dramatically, it is essential that he should receive the strange woman, but one wonders whether Alcestis - is this Alcestis? - will find the happiness which she deserves.

The concept of hospitality, which was largely involved with inter-relationship responsibility, appears to have been of prime importance to Admetus' social life, and plays a vital part in the structure of the plot. Alcestis dies, for love, because of Apollo's gratitude. Alcestis is saved, by loving friendship, because of Heracles' gratitude. Admetus accepts the stranger, against his will, because of his gratitude to Heracles. The morality of hospitality, which itself is a caring, a concern, a form of loving, knits the parts together, with Alcestis, the personification of love, as the unconscious, motivating force.

Love and hospitality, love and friendship are interlinked: both, demanding mutual trust and respect, a reciprocity of understanding and intention in action and word, an unselfish appreciation of the rights and needs of the other. Alcestis' love for Admetus was stronger than her love of life. Heracles' friendship was strong enough to motivate a combat with Death. Between them, was Admetus, the social conformist, unable to accept the most important rule

of conformity - that one must die - and, yet, saved by the love and friendship of the other two.

To love and hospitality now add death. Death which is mankind's inevitable end, the dark shadow which hangs over the play, appears to control the action and seems to have been miraculously defeated. Euripides uses the same exaggerated presentation as was common to the satyr-play. His Death is malevolent, intransigent, implacable, making a brief appearance, but sufficient to establish his power and the impossibility of escape. He is always on time, never late, the obedient and willing servant of the Fates. Even the gods understand that Death must, eventually, come to men; the younger they are, the happier Death is. Nevertheless - he is overcome by Heracles. The strength of goodness, the power of love, grants a temporary reprieve. He will, of course, have his revenge, but Admetus is given the time, another chance, to understand the reality of love, and the worth of his wife.

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No time is wasted. Apollo establishes his obligation to Admetus, the latter's failure to find a substitute death-victim and Alcestis' self-sacrifice. "She is in the house now, gathered in his arms and held/at the breaking point of life, because the destiny marks/this for her day of death and taking leave of life." (Ls.19-21<sup>a</sup>)<sup>1</sup>. Death is imminent and, at that moment, makes a dramatic entry. He has come and has no intention of being fobbed off, again. He has the power, and no fear of the god, whose talk of a last-minute saviour, he scorns. His presence is indicative of Alcestis' approaching departure. There is silence. The Chorus expresses our anxiety, our thoughts, our expectancy.

1. Euripides I. pp. 7-53 (Grune and Lattimore, 1955).



Is she yet living, this extraordinary woman -- "-- who in my mind appears/noble beyond/all women beside in a wife's duty?" (Ls.83-5). This is the appointed day and nothing can save her, but there is no evidence of the signs of death outside the house.

At last! A maidservant brings news. Admetus has just begun to appreciate the reality of what his wife has done and that she is about to leave him. The maid praises her mistress. This is no sycophantic mouthing, but the evidently sincere affection for one whose behaviour to others surrounds her with love -- "What shall the wife be who surpasses her? And how/could any woman show that she loves her husband more/than herself better than consent to die for him?" (Ls.153-5). Alcestis bids farewell to her household. Admetus holds her tightly, but he cannot prevent her from going -- "Had/he died, he would have lost her, but in this escape/he will keep the pain. It will not ever go away." (Ls.196-8). Before she departs on her journey to the dark, she begs to see the light of the sun once more -- Apollo's sun, he who has been instrumental in her passing. Euripides shows his mastery in the gradual increase of expectation; from Death, himself, to death, narrated, and now to death, in actuality. The audience is made an integral part of the slow but certain progress of the inevitable; a rare and innovatory experience for the presentation of an on-stage death was, by custom, regarded with distaste.

The Chorus mourn such courageous nobility, and we begin to pity the man who has allowed this thing to happen, one -- "-- who is losing a wife/brave beyond all others, and must live a life/that will be no life for the rest of time." (Ls.241-3). He made a voluntary choice and must now suffer

the consequences. He speaks to Alcestis, trying to hold her back, but she has, already, gone beyond him. Despite his presence, or, perhaps, because of it - for she will not be able to forget what he is allowing her to do for him - she is alone and afraid. She can see Death's dark and forbidding frown. Admetus, the guilty one, talks too much, full of self-pity and exaggerating where there should have been the emotional support of silence. She is quite unable to reciprocate in the same tone. Calmly and quietly, she reminds him of the facts, of what she is doing, of what others have failed to do. She is more concerned with her children now, than with him, and extracts a promise,, full of foresight, that there shall be no second marriage, which might harm them. She considers their future. It is unbearable. They will, perhaps, remember her for her courage - but - how will they consider their father? He is still trying to deny reality, making dramatic promises and blaming anybody but himself. His lack of sensitivity for her is marked. This is neither the time nor the place for expressions of vindictive and uncalled-for hatred for those who were not prepared to accept a responsibility which was rightly his own. How could he say that he loved her! She is receiving no comfort from him at all, and she withdraws even further from him. She gives him her children. What else can she do? She knows that -- "Time will soften it. The dead count for nothing at all." (L.381), and that for all his noisy and unceasing protestations, he will forget. She does not ask for any sign of physical affection from him. She bids farewell to her children for the last time, but to her husband, a brief goodbye and she is gone. We are suspended in the vacuum of loss and there is silence.

Suddenly the young child expresses our sorrow, with a poignant simplicity. Death is a total withdrawal and he cannot understand, but he is sufficiently aware to realise that his mother was companionship and love, care and comfort and that without her -- "the whole house is ruined." (L.415). The child sees the reality where the man has shied away from it.

The arrival of Heracles relieves the tension, creates interest in a new character and his purpose, and serves as reinforcement of Admetus' interpretation of hospitality. In spite of the obvious signs of mourning, which indicate to Heracles that he should not remain, Admetus insists. Friendship is stronger than personal grief, and he does not tell Heracles that it is Alcestis who has died. The Chorus praises his consideration and kindness, and we wonder -- "The noble strain/comes out, in respect for others." (Ls.600-1) -- and his wife? Ironically, the bier is brought into the orchestra at this moment, and remains there throughout the ensuing violently unpleasant scene. We are constantly reminded of Alcestis and the unselfishness of her devoted love as we listen to the bitter and evil recriminations between father and son; the former justifying his understandable refusal to die, the latter, cruelly accusatory, expressing his own submerged guilt. The evidence of Alcestis' sacrifice is plainly and painfully present. In such an atmosphere, she is carried to her resting place. The woman who epitomised love, and -- "who was like a mother to all the house." (L.769).

The servants whom she cared for are unable to express their sorrow or watch her departure. Heracles' presence and the duty of hospitality prohibit any sign of grief, but his

insistence finally breaks down the barrier imposed by the over-scrupulous master, and he is told the truth. "We are all dead and done for now, not only she." (L.825). Without the guiding hand of the mistress, whose gentle calm ruled the household, there will be disruption and discord. Heracles, upholder of good against evil, secretly determines to win Alcestis back from Death; his gift to Admetus for his welcome.

We have overheard this scheme and, however improbable it seems, we begin to wonder and to hope. Admetus has no hope. He returns to a house emptied of Alcestis' loving presence. He realises what he has lost, and why. The Chorus is growing somewhat tired of this never-ending self-pity -- a little realism is needed -- "-- Still you saved/your own life and substance/Your wife is dead, your love forsaken./What is new in this? Before/now death has parted/many from their wives." (Ls.928-34) - but not quite like this? He pulls himself together and begins to think plainly, at last. She has done a wonderful thing and will be remembered. He is -- "--the man, disgracefully alive, who dared/not die, but like a coward gave his wife instead/ and so escaped death. Do you call him a man at all?" (Ls.955-7). Indulgence of the self blinds the moral sense. He begins to understand what the Chorus is saying. She denied self and will always be recalled with the love which she, so readily, gave to others. --"It was the best of all women to whom you were joined in marriage." (Ls.993-4). It is a beautiful and worthy epitaph, and he is shamed into silence.

Heracles returns with a veiled woman. A miracle? Is it possible that this can really be Alcestis? Admetus refuses to befriend her, for he remembers the promise he made

to his dying wife. The temptation is there, for the stranger reminds him of her. Is this man going to refuse his second chance? He is persuaded, by the duties of friendship, and he takes her by the hand. The bond has been re-forged. --"For now we shall make our life again, and it will be/a better one". (Ls.1156-7). Alcestis says not a word.

Whether Euripides really believed in the extra-physical is not, after all, important. He must have appreciated its value as a dramatic device which would both excite interest and resolve a tragic situation to the emotional satisfaction of the audience. By illustrating the power of love as an all-conquering factor, he presents the possibility, the hope for concord and peace.

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(b) Which destroys

Medea

"With a happy laugh, Eros sped out of the high-roofed hall on his way back, leaving his shaft deep in the girl's breast, hot as fire. Time and again she darted a bright glance at Jason. All else was forgotten. Her heart, brimful of this new agony, throbbed within her and overflowed with the sweetness of the pain." (Ap. Rhod. III. p. 117).

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"Medea", the first extant tragedy of Euripides, was the introductory play of a tetralogy, initially presented in 431, when the dramatist was about fifty years old. The beginning of the war with Sparta, together with its causal factors, was the background to its creation and performance. Although not deemed worthy of the major award, subsequent generations have come to appreciate its dramatic value, and,

particularly the power of the female role. H.D.F. Kitto<sup>1</sup> and J. Ferguson<sup>2</sup> both regard it as one of the greatest of Greek tragedies.

Euripides' source-material was taken from the saga of the Argonauts, led by Jason, their capture of the Golden Fleece and the events consequent upon their return to Greece; a story which has remained familiar to generations of children up to the present day. Its origins may be connected with the first expedition from the mainland towards the east, where, no doubt, the myth of riches was the magnetic attraction. Euripides, however, did not choose to create an Aristotelian tragedy, with Jason as his flawed hero, but centred his interpretation upon Medea, princess of Colchis, Jason's wife and grand-daughter of Helios, the sun-god. This blood-connection with a deity appears to have given her supernatural powers and recognition as a sorceress. Not only is the central character a woman, but an exotic foreigner who is skilled in the black arts, a combination of barbarous attributes which would not have endeared her to the Greeks. The history of her relationship with Jason would further have discouraged any feeling of sympathetic understanding.

Medea fell in love with Jason when, in search of the Fleece, he arrived in Colchis, which was at the eastern end of the Black Sea. Apollonius lays the responsibility for this attraction at the door of Eros<sup>3</sup>, servitor of Aphrodite; while G.S. Kirk<sup>4</sup> cites Aeschylus the inference is that the passion was uncontrolled because god-inspired. It, certainly, had very unfortunate consequences, which not only revealed Medea's emotional imbalance but her amorality. In order to protect and serve her man, she betrayed her country,

1 Kitto H.D.F. (1939).

2. Ferguson John. (1977)

murdered her young brother and persuaded the innocent to commit patricide. These deaths involved actions of an unfeeling cruelty which recoiled upon herself, resulting in permanent exile from both her father's and her husband's kingdoms. With Jason and her children, she was forced to find refuge in Corinth. It is here that the play commences and the character of Medea is examined, together with the circumstances which have arisen due to her previous dreadful choice of action. Joined to a wife, whose foreign origins deny recognition of her role by the Greeks, and whose aptitude for the callously destructive makes her increasingly dangerous to him, Jason decides to adopt safer measures for his future, and marry the king of Corinth's daughter. Medea is abandoned. Isolated by her birth, her nature, her intelligence and her reputation, she becomes more and more embittered by this desertion for, patently, expedient and self-gratifying reasons.

It is possible that the contemporary audience, wholly familiar with this story, may have been beguiled by Euripides' artistry to regard her initial appearance with some feeling of pity, but it is doubtful whether her ensuing activities could have produced other than the antipathetic reaction. It is, indeed, difficult to see how even today's audience, accustomed as it is to media-disseminated violence, could regard Medea other than with an objective pity, examinable as a psychological case-study. She is not an unintelligent, manipulated plaything of some stronger external force, but a woman renowned for her cleverness. She is fully aware of what she has done and of what she is about to do. She is not a victim of fate, but a victim of her own free-will to choose. The interesting question is --

why did she disregard the possibility of good?

T.B.L.Webster<sup>1</sup> has no hesitation in categorising her as a bad woman and the epitome of an evil which permeates the play. He compares her to Clytemnestra, whom he considers to have been directed by the gods; Medea is her own mistress. As has been previously stated, simplistic labelling tends to ignore the complexities of the personality and the reasons why some of its elements have gained dominance over others, to the advantage or the detriment of the individual, the self-image and the role in society.

Medea is a princess, with all that that implies, and, in Greek terms, a barbarian, uncivilised, subject to extremes of attitude and behaviour. She is intelligent, self-responsible to the point of wilfulness, and had already chosen a path towards evil in her acceptance and practice of the arts of sorcery. She loves Jason, obsessively, prepared to adopt any measure, however heinous, which will advance his cause, her cause; which will protect her possession. She is the antithesis of Alcestis, whose love for Admetus was selfless, full of a charitable goodness which was able to conquer death and regenerate the living. Her love filled the house with its peace and the warmth of its beauty. To sacrifice one's life for another is the height of regard; to sacrifice one's children for the satisfaction of an insane pride is an obscenity, excusable only on the grounds of a deeply-rooted psychological sickness.

It would appear that Medea's love is primarily guided by lust. Such a relationship, which in this particular case was denied the development of love, in its all-embracing sense, because her actions continually encouraged discord rather than concord, such a relationship breeds within itself

1. Webster, T.B.L. (1967).



the possibility of rejection, insecurity and humiliation. To a woman, such as Medea, whose emotions governed her wit, the discarding of her body presented an insult which demanded her own form of retributive justice. Love-lust is replaced by a defensive hatred which seeks to destroy, as cruelly as it is possible for a follower of evil to devise. The veneer of civilised society is stripped away by the power of natural forces, which, by ensuring that Medea is saved from punishment, accept that amorality is justifiable.

Euripides' realistic characterisation, in carefully avoiding the over-emphasis of the melodramatic, focusses attention upon this diabolical, yet tragic, woman. However antipathetic the reaction towards her, she centralises our attention. The nature of the interpretation is dramatic in itself, and it is artistically obvious why Euripides should have chosen to create his tragedy around the woman. What, however, was the didactic purpose? How was it intended that the play, not over-well received, should be interpreted by an Athenian audience involved in preparations for imminent conflict against a long-standing foe?

Two levels of supposition become apparent -- the specific, that is, specific to its temporal-spatial context, and the general, that is, its applicability as a universal, and, thus, its timeless relevance.

On the specific level, one is made aware of three possible areas which, as instructional media, might have aroused audience interest and discussion, and would have gratified civic concern in the substantiation of accepted fact.

Firstly, importance is attached to the woman's role in society, Medea is explicit on this point, and one is made

especially aware of the social position, the potential isolation, of a foreigner in a Greek environment. This produces two dangerous factors both based upon the premise that the form of the personality has been moulded by the dominant characteristic of an inherent dichotomy -- the result of a choice between the rational and the irrational, the intellect and the emotions. Where the latter becomes more powerful, as in the case of Medea, irrationality governs the individual and is capable of disrupting the social environment. A rebel wife, or wives, could not only disturb the equilibrium of the state, but, in diminishing male superiority, destabilise the masculine self-image. A rebellious foreigner averse from her imposed situation, carries the germ of social unrest and possible violence. The warning to the audience was patently clear and, almost, too obvious for an artist of Euripides' ability.

Secondly, Athens, in considering herself as the centre of civilisation and the personification of all goodness, was prepared to offer sanctuary to the refugee, no matter how heinous the fault. It is Aegeus of Athens who accepts Medea despite her dreadful crimes, an act of an overwhelming generosity. One could say, therefore, that Euripides appropriated this particular episode from the mythical corpus in order to glorify his city at a time of danger. The play, thus, becomes a form of propaganda, a morale-booster at the commencement of the war.

Finally, the contrast between Jason, controlled and politically adroit, and Medea, emotionally unbalanced and unreliable, could have been interpreted as metaphors for the Greek, the cultured Athenian, protector of moderation, and the foreigner, dangerous and unstable, who could easily

represent a violently uncontrolled Sparta, the aggressive enemy.

The play's universality lies in the study of its principal character, whose personality governs its course towards a conclusion which emphasises Medea's supernatural powers. This is a recognizable portrait of one who has allowed emotion to control her intellect, and has disallowed the existence of, and the possibility of utilising, the mean. She becomes increasingly imprisoned in a web of evil, a prisoner of an uncontrolled and lustful passion. Her knowledge of witchcraft, and the unholy media of its practice, have already directed her towards a poisoned life; because her feeling for Jason is sexually motivated, she is not able to experience the regenerative power, the salvation of true love which could have re-directed her towards goodness, moderation and peace.

Once experienced, evil actions become cumulative and have less and less moral effect upon the one performing them. Such actions are motivated by egocentricity, an all-consuming pride in oneself-as-god, ignoring all ethical dicta which might conflict with one's own desires. If Medea had been a stupid woman, a degree of extenuation might be a possibility but she was clever and, therefore, self-responsible, with the will to evaluate and choose. She elects to show her feeling for her man through violence of an extraordinarily unpleasant nature. She is psychologically unbalanced. When Jason, eventually, abandons her for, what he hopes will be, a more normal life of greater security, one understands, but fears for his safety. Medea, isolated by her nature and her situation, will, undoubtedly defend herself like a wild beast attacked by hounds. She is alone in an unfavourable

environment which encourages an uncertainty of identity, an insubstantiality and a rejection of reality. The need to re-establish the self-image demands some action which will attract attention. She is Medea and chooses violence. She calls it revenge, inspired by a new-born hatred. Unlike Hecuba, whose estrangement from reality was caused by an accumulation of direful circumstances for which she was not responsible, Medea, knows perfectly well what she is doing. She, deliberately, buries all maternal feeling beneath the weight of the dead relationship and chooses to kill her children, not to save them from death at another's avenging hand but that she may cause the maximum hurt to their father. She would destroy his possessions, his hold upon life, himself. She reaches the nadir of evil by this dreadful decision, rejecting the strength of the natural bond between mother and child, the power of which directs the mother to protect and save the child, at no matter what cost to herself. She has lost all sense of morality, self-armoured against pity, able to withstand remorse and regret.

The tragedy of Medea lies in her knowing adoption of wickedness. A psychological imbalance, fuelled by an uncontrolled sexual passion, produces an irrationality which destroys love and peace, not only within herself but for those who are her unfortunate associates. Mental sickness which becomes a weapon of destruction is not specific to fifth century Athens. It is, indeed, relevant to the present century.

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With originality, Euripides uses the Nurse, a slave, one of the few attractive characters in the play, to begin the

action with the presentation of a sympathetic picture of the rejected Medea, whose heart was once -- "-- on fire with passionate love for Jason." (L.8)<sup>1</sup>. She, also, contrives to warn us of Medea's potentiality for the irrational -- "She's a strange woman. I know it won't be easy/To make an enemy of her and come off best." (Ls.44-5). Suspense grows dramatically stronger when we hear that Creon has decided to banish mother and children from his kingdom. Replaced in her husband's regard, friendless and unprotected, what will Medea do now? This news must be kept from her at the moment for fear of an ungovernable violence, from which the children must be saved -- "She'll not stop raging until she has struck at someone./May it be an enemy and not a friend she hurts." (Ls.94-5). The slave's commonsense -- "--what is moderate sounds best." (L.126), and her kindly concern for the children's welfare contrasts with Medea's exaggerated off-stage lamentations and threats which accompany the on-stage action, and which prepare the audience for her eventual entrance.

We learn that she is not as friendless as we had imagined, but supported by the Chorus, a group of Corinthian women, who offer their sympathy, their advice and seek to calm an excess of feeling which they, too, fear may have an irrevocable ending. Medea, the clever actress, enters, the hysteria well under control, and reveals her ability to manipulate the susceptible to her own advantage: this is certainly a formidable woman. Although a foreigner, she shares, with her Greek friends, an appreciation of the expected nature of the woman's role, sympathetically understanding, criticising, inducing a reinforced realisation of her own situation -- "We women are the most unfortunate

<sup>1</sup> Euripides I pp. 59-108 (Grene and Lattimore, 1955).

creatures." (L.231), but, to be a stranger, -- "--a refugee, thought nothing of/By my husband - something he won in a foreign land." (Ls.255-6) -- she embroiders somewhat -- is something which calls for pity. Women, together, allied against men, will serve each other. The Greeks agree that Medea is morally justified in seeking revenge and will support her by keeping silence. They continue to give her their loyalty until the end, which says a great deal about their feelings for men and their own position in the state.

Medea certainly needs help, for Creon, wisely protected by attendants, arrives to direct her and the children to exile. She is too dangerous, far too clever for his peace of mind. He fears for the safety of his daughter, Jason's new wife. Medea conquers her shock and despair - it is evident that she can control her emotions when it is expedient to do so - and attempts supplication. To no avail. Although he knows that he is no match for this woman, he mistakenly listens to her rationalisation of the situation and permits a twenty-four hour extension of her stay in his country -- "For in it you can do none of the things I fear." (L.356)

He does not understand the power of Medea's need for revenge. He does not see the mocking falseness of her pleading, her contempt for his gullibility which will allow her to kill, with a coldly pleasurable logic, as a servant of Hecate, mistress of the underworld and its darkness. She is joined to evil, from her own choice. Women, devious, deceitful, dishonest have difficulty in working for good and "--Are of every evil the cleverest of contrivers." (L.409) She generalises as a means of self-substantiation. The Chorus is in continued accord with the idea of revenge: it

is men who are false. At that moment, Jason arrives to prove this point.

The ensuing dialogue between the disloyal husband and the betrayed wife shows the logical justification for Medea's attitude. If only she had stopped at verbal recrimination, she would have retained our sympathy in the rightfulness of her cause. Jason is shown to be cold, heartless and pompous, secure in his own self-opinion, smugly contemptuous of the one whom he has injured. When love, which is lust, dies, to inflict the pain of humiliation upon the rejected becomes a pleasure, but is as degrading to the one who gives as to the one who receives -- "-- the plausible speaker/who is a villain deserves the greatest punishment./Confident in his tongue's power to adorn evil,/He stops at nothing." (Ls.580-83). The listening Chorus, continuing their supportive role, advocate, rather late in the day, moderation, especially where sexuality is rife, and, appositely, introduce the concept of friendship, especially valuable to those in need; Aegeus of Athens, with fortuitously good timing, suddenly appears.

Medea has, already, realised that the intended slaughter will ostracise her from society. Here is the answer to her problem. Aegeus, hearing of Jason's desertion, agrees to offer her sanctuary provided that she finds her own way to his city. He will give her refuge and protection but is not prepared, for diplomatic reasons, to give active assistance for her escape -- "-- I will reach your city as soon as I can,/Having done the deed I have to do and gained my end." (Ls.757-8) This scene, forming a brief hiatus of reasoned quiet, not only ensures that Medea will now proceed without further hesitation, but illustrates, for the benefit of the

audience, the remarkable nature of the Athenian ethos.

The emotional rapport which has developed between Medea, the foreigner, and the Corinthian women creates an exceptional bond between them. Medea entrusts her intentions to the Greeks; the women are her friends, Greek men her enemies. The fiendish amorality of her plan now becomes wholly evident. Her children are to be carriers of death-gifts to the princess. Their innocence being no protection, they, too, must be destroyed, and by her own hand. -- "It is not bearable to be mocked by enemies." (L.797). Jason will have lost everything. She will have won. The Chorus begs her to reconsider. She is drugged by the growing strength of her depraved obsession, and will not listen as they sing of Athens' glory: will it still be able to provide a refuge for the one who wilfully commits the ultimate horror of child-murder?

Jason returns, at her request. The scene is full of the ironies of her duplicity, pretending sorrow for her previous attitude, manoeuvring Jason to suit her own ends. He is to ask for the children's reprieve from banishment; they will carry rich gifts of persuasion - and death -- "O children,/How ready to cry I am, how full of foreboding!" (Ls.902-3). Is she still acting? Are her natural feelings pushing their way through the murk? The dialogue continues to be full of ambiguity and uncertainty, but the horror remains -- that children should be made the purveyors of death; that death should be their reward. The Chorus realises this immediately -- "They are walking already to murder." (L.977). It is too late, now. "The gods and I,/I in a kind of madness, have contrived all this." (Ls.1013-4). The children return. She is to go into



exile, they may remain. All might yet be well, but her pride smothers her motherhood. The husband, the enemy, must be injured to the uttermost, for -- "--stronger than all my afterthoughts is my fury,/Fury that brings upon mortals the greatest evils. (Ls.1079-80)

Once again, she has been given the opportunity, and once again, she chooses the way of wickedness. She waits, with a dreadful anticipatory delight, for news of death -- "You will delight me twice/ As much again if you say they died in agony." (Ls.1134-5). They have. Creon and his daughter have perished most horribly. She is pitiless, for them, for herself. She must kill the children quickly, before they are revengefully butchered --"--by another hand less kindly to them." (L.1239). A perverted love which destroys. Death is inevitable. We hear a pathetically heartrending cry. We imagine the children's terror, their shocking disbelief, as they see their mother, clutching a sword, her face rigid with an insane determination. There is nowhere for them to hide. No one to help them. They are lost. Their father arrives too late to save them, too late for vengeance upon their mother, for she, now demonstrating her affinity to the gods, is revealed, with her dead children, above the skene. Her grandfather, Helius, has saved her. They are in a chariot, drawn by dragons, presenting a scene of barbaric splendour and power; a theatrically exciting presentation of the supernatural, with, at its centre, the figure of Medea, untouchable, inexorable. She will bury her children and then go to Athens. Hatred dominates the conclusion. There is no possibility of forgiveness.

Medea is without compassion or remorse, finding self-glorification in the ability to inflict pain. She

remains unpunished.

Love based wholly upon the emotions and tending towards a prideful ego-centrism discourages the exercise of loyalty, trust, honesty and an unselfish awareness of the needs of the other. It is mutable, because so based, unreliable, fragile, easily broken. Such a love, where there is no moderating factor, no guiding principle of good, can, in circumstances unfavourable to the lover, develop and change into an irrational hatred which destroys internal and external peace. Love which is truly love bears with adversity, and accepts the possibility of self-sacrifice. It is faith and patience; protection and comforter. It is the medium of peace.

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## CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the role and position of social groups, even within the immediate past, tends towards the generalisation which is both subjective and dogmatic. The impression gained from the overall picture, however well and painstakingly substantiated, obscures the minutiae of its contents. It is the presentation of one individual's interpretation of reality, offered as categorical fact, whereas it is but the appearance and not the actuality of truth. An explanation of the distant past is, obviously, even more liable to uncertainty and, therefore, calls for an awareness of the need for the assumptional rather than the authoritative statement. However specialised the knowledge and detailed the evidence, however experienced the investigator, the conclusions to which one arrives will be subjectively based. One should, also, recognize the possible existence of the embedded bias which will contain its own seed of influence. One should be prepared to accept controversy, and with due humility, re-evaluate one's own findings in the light of those of others.

The role of women in fifth century Athens cannot be determined with certainty. It is probable that the appearance, within the context of a specific pattern of mores, belies the actuality. Women of the citizen-class appear to have held a subsidiary, though not subservient, position in a society dominated by men. To be subsidiary, however, does not imply that one is socially negligible. The women had potential power in three vital areas -- the home, the economy and the practice of religious belief. The richer the wife, the greater her influence. Even without wealth, the woman, responsible as procreator and initial

educator, for ensuring the stability of her society, had an important task to fulfil. It is probable, therefore, that this, apparently, disregarded group were, in fact, honoured and protected, both by the state and by their men, whom they left to govern the wider environment, whilst they contented themselves within the more restricted confines of the home. Their role was essential for the maintenance of civic equilibrium. The men must have realised and appreciated this fact, however tenacious they were of their own presumed position.

The suppositional complexities of this inter-relationship found a readily available medium in the drama, giving overt expression to a covertly accepted situation. In this wholly male-dominated art-form, spiritually oriented, and demanding an intellectual as well as an emotional content, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides the only tragedians of the period whose work remains, in other than fragmentary quotation, created female roles of undoubted influence, and, certainly, of dramatic power. From myth and legend of the past but expressed within the terms of the present, they illustrated the woman's connection with her environment and her effect upon those within it. Whether her actions were controlled by the gods or self-motivated, she was presented as the poets' medium of communication for the spiritual and moral universals which affect all mankind, irrespective of either time or place.

Why women? Why did the dramatists not concentrate upon the portrayal of the imperfect hero as the mouthpiece of the message? Although this institutionalised form of drama was still comparatively young, they must have sensed that, not only, was there value in diversity, but that an all-male cast

would detract from the intended impact, and that the presentation of the, supposedly, weaker sex in a role of importance would increase the play's dramatic and, thus, its didactic power.

In presenting realistic female characters who were psychologically recognizable, the dramatists allowed for the individual reception and interpretation of the message contained in the action. Depending upon one's socio-cultural level, or the degree of existing bias, the manner of receptivity would vary. As a generalisation, the woman, the socially-denigrated, who showed signs of self-sufficiency and self-determination, was not to be trusted to maintain the status quo; the strong woman, with masculine tendencies, was to be particularly feared. In both instances, the role was interpreted as a warning of the danger inherent in women who failed to comply with the expected norm of behaviour. The sensitively intelligent members of the audience, however, would probably have understood the dramatist's underlying intention. Impelled by his beliefs, he used his artistic skill to convey what he regarded as the imperatives of existence, for the benefit of his fellows. Through the potent power of this particular art-form, it was possible for him to enter into the hearts and minds of his audience; to change, to influence, to direct through a totality of sensory involvement. If he had wished to be a rabble-rouser, he would have used men - warriors, politicians, orators - to carry his message, but in choosing women, he introduced a subtly contrived suggestibility through a medium of an apparent weakness, to create an influence which is lasting, effective and of a universal applicability.

The existence of love is essential to growth. It

brings the warmth and comfort of a security within which the individual may develop, unhindered by discord, loneliness or fear. It encourages mutual understanding, care and concern, the exercise of patience, tolerance and generosity -- all those outgoing attributes which are a denial of self. It breeds service; it is devotion and self-sacrifice. It is amity and concord and, thus, it provides the right environment within which peace may flourish, that peace which man longs for but which he finds it so hard to attain, that peace which will allow for the safe continuation of that so-necessary security created by love. From true love, the flower of peace will bloom; through peace, in peace, the seeds of love will spread. Man's survival depends upon this. It is fitting that woman, as creator, should be the mouthpiece.

Whether the dramatists meant this to be their message it is, of course, not possible to say with certainty. The interpretation of their intention is, necessarily, personal to the writer, and is based upon the self-evident importance attached to these two vital elements, an importance which must have been as recognizable over two thousand years ago as it is to-day. Without the practice of a love which generates peace, man's proclivity towards ego-centrism will end by destroying him. The choice of play for analysis has been governed by an understanding and appreciation of the text which is, similarly, personal. If there has been a smaller number of examples of love and peace in comparison with those for hatred and war, that is because the latter are the strongest advocates for the former which it is possible to imagine. Women directly involved in evil, or influenced by evil situations arising from malice or conflict are,

likewise, supplicants for good.

A very considerable pleasure has been experienced throughout the progress of this work. It has been an honour to have been so involved with the creativity of three such remarkable, and different, men. Brian Vickers<sup>1</sup> expresses exactly what the writer feels -- "The reading of Greek tragedy has been one of the great experiences in my life, and I can only hope that I have communicated something of the value which it has had for me."

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1. Vickers, Brian (1973), p. xiv.

The environmental context within which the plays were written - probable influence upon the matter and manner of composition.

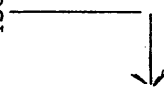
Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides

- (a) Total period of interest in terms of the life-span = 525 (Aeschylus' birth) to 406 (Sophocles' death)
- (b) Total period of interest in terms of the span of creativity (extant plays, only) = c.470 (Aeschylus) to c.406-5 (Euripides - posthumous)

[illegible]



Date 1	Event 2	Date 1	Play 2	Subject 3	Dramatist 4
546-27 + 534 525 508	<u>Peisistratos - tyrannos → governmental centralisation → social stability</u> The commencement of the formalisation, institutionalisation of <u>Attic tragedy</u> <u>Birth of Aeschylus (d.456)</u> Consolidation of democratic government under <u>Cleisthenes</u>				
B 497 490-479 485 479-54	<u>5th Century influences</u> <u>Birth of Sophocles (d.406)</u> War with Persia and the ultimate victory for Athens <u>Birth of Euripides (d.407)</u> Creation of the Athenian Empire +	Unknown ?earliest 472	Prometheus Bound Persians	Gods v. mankind Athens' glorified Hubris → defeat	<u>Aeschylus</u> "

Date 1	Event 2	Date 1	Play 2	Subject 3	Dramatist 4
461-29	<p>Periclean Athens -- a period of creativity and civic pride over-shadowed by the threat of Spartan aggression</p>	c. 470	Suppliant Women	Hubris: marriage	<u>Aeschylus</u>
		467	Seven Against Thebes	Hubris	"
		458	Oresteia	Gods and man	"
			(1st prize)	Athens' glorified	
			Ajax	Gods v. man	<u>Sophocles</u>
431-404	<p>The Peloponnesian War</p>	- 40		Hubris	"
		c. 441-2	Antigone	Conflict of principle	
		438	Alcestis	Self-sacrifice: the woman	<u>Euripides</u>
		431	Medea	Revenge: the woman	"

Date 1	Event 2	Date 1	Play 2	Subject 3	Dramatist 4
430	The plague at Athens (the death of Pericles, 429)	c. 430	Heraclidae	Athens' glorified	<u>Euripides</u>
+		c. 439	Oedipus	Hubris: gods' power	<u>Sophocles</u>
429-27	Siege of Plataea → wholesale slaughter of the defenders (male): women and children = slaves	-12	the King (1st prize)	(cf. plague and genocide)	
		c. 430- -14	Electra	Vengeance: woman's role	"
+		428	Hippolytos (1st prize)	Sexuality v. chastity: woman	<u>Euripides</u>
427	Lesbos' rebellion → potential genocide; rescinded on political not on humane grounds	c. 428	Andromache	War play: women brutalised	<u>Euripides</u>
427-4	1st. Sicilian expedition → abortive	-24			
425	Spartan defeat at Sphacteria	c. 424-3	Hecuba	War play: woman	<u>Euripides</u>
424	Athens' defeat at Delium	c. 423-20	Supplices	Patriotic: political	"

Date 1	Event 2	Date 1	Play 2	Subject 3	Dramatist 4
421 + 420	Peace of Nicias → Renewal of sporadic fighting: Alcibiades and the irrationality of youthful privilege	c.421-13  c.420-16 c.420-10	Electra  Heracles Trachiniae	War play: women Patriotism Violence → retribution	<u>Euripides</u> " <u>Sophocles</u>
418 + 416	Spartan victory at Mantinea  Rebellion at Melos → genocide	c.418-11  415	Iphigenia in Tauris Trojan Women (2nd prize)	Exile: recognition renewal: woman War play: women (cf. Melos)	<u>Euripides</u> "
→  + 415 + 413	Neo-peace → a seeming economic recovery; an increase in the slave; i.e. labour - force → to the attraction of the colonisation of Sicily as a medium for expansion The Athenian expedition to Syracuse → Defeat and destruction of naval and military forces	412	Helen	Stupidity of war: women	"

Date 1	Event 2	Date 1	Play 2	Subject 3	Dramatist 4
412 +	Ionian revolt - at Alcibiades' instigation	c.412-10	Ion	Athens' imperialism	Euripides
411-10	Oligarchical Rule by the 400 in Athens = totalitarianism: the rejection of democracy after defeat	c.411-8	Phoenissae	War play	Euripides
+					
409	Carthage invades Sicily	409	Philoctetes (1st prize)	Morality of political necessity	<u>Sophocles</u>
		408	Orestes	War play	<u>Euripides</u>
		c.407-2	Oedipus at Colonus	Athens' glorified	<u>Sophocles</u>
		(Posthumous production)			
408	<u>Euripides'</u> self-imposed exile to the court of Archelaus I of Macedonia, where he died in 407 leaving these two beautiful plays: probable production in Macedonia → equally probable posthumous performance and recognition at the Great Dionysia of 405	c.406-5	Iphigenia in Aulis	Self-sacrifice woman	<u>Euripides</u>
		c.406-5	The Bacchae	Gods v. man and - women	"

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